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VIEWS AND VAGABONDS

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TO

O. M. W.

AND

P. W.

This kind of attitude is bound up with the idea of progress. It comes of taking all the value out of the past and present, in order to put it into the future. And then you *don't* put it there! You can't! It evaporates somehow, in the process. Where is it then? Well, I believe it's always there in life, and in every kind of life. It's there all the time, in all the things you condemn. Of course the things really are bad that you say are bad. But they're so good as well. . . . Life itself is the interest. . . . And if you leave it out, you leave out the only thing that counts. That's why ideals are so empty; just because, I mean, they don't exist.

G. Lowes Dickinson. *A Modern Symposium.*

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VIEWS AND VAGABONDS

CHAPTER I

THE PEDLARS

BENJAMIN BUNTER hammered a red-hot shoe, gloriously enveloped in a shower of sparks, bathed in ruddy light, a stalwart person of twenty-two in a leather apron and rolled up shirt-sleeves. His apprentice, who was thirteen, knelt before the fire and puffed the bellows; and both dripped, because of their energy and because the forge was hot, and the evening warm for June. Benjamin Bunter was a very energetic young man; and he really liked making horse-shoes; it was so interesting. His forge was just outside the village of Wattles, on the London road, opposite the milestone which said London LVII, Cambridge V. Londonwards the road ran between broad grassy borders—a beautiful riding-road. And on either side of the road, beyond the white may hedges, the green fields swelled, golden with buttercups, and sweet with clover. The little wind that got up with the twilight carried the smell of the fields straight to the open forge door. But Benjamin Bunter was too busy to notice it much.

The shoe was finished and laid by to cool. Benjamin Bunter straightened himself, threw back his square shoulders, and stood to let the evening coolness fan his hot face. Silhouetted thus against the red glow within, he seemed a sturdy person, square-built, square-chinned, square-browed, black-haired, with something of the grave child about him, and if he was two-and-twenty it was all he would be.

"Tim," he said, in his soft, deepish boy's voice, "you can go home now."

The apprentice imp shuffled himself into a coat. Home wasn't where one would go, of course, an evening like this—but no matter. As he slipped out at the door, he was arrested by a sound; his master too was arrested, and both stood listening.

There was a patter of feet on the London road—a light, foot-pace clapping, and with each clap a slip-shod chink.

"A little moke," said the imp, "what's losing a shoe."

His master nodded, and they listened again.

"Two little mokes," the imp amended. He was a bright child.

"Quite so," said Benjamin Bunter; and they went on listening.

They couldn't see anything but the glimmer of the white road winding through the dusk, with the pink glow of the long-set sun over the dim fields to the west, and the half of a golden moon swinging up in the green east. "Tumbling on 'er face," said the imp. "It'll rain to-morrer. Besides, the ants

were a-crossin' the road this afternoon ; a-crossin' to and fro they was, like mad 'uns." That proved it ; ants always know.

Two little red lights came into sight, jogging along the road ; it seemed that the two little mokes were dragging a highish sort of cart. " You needn't stay, Tim," the smith told his apprentice, and the apprentice vanished into the night. He wasn't going to stay and help shoe a little moke unless he had to.

The smith watched the red lights jog. When they had jogged to within two hundred yards of the forge, he could hear voices talking. One said, " L-look, there's a forge," and another (it must have been another, because it was a key lower, but it had the same melancholy softness, and the same stammer) said, " Of course. I've been s-seeing it for miles," which was no doubt untrue, and sounded as if they had been quarrelling a little.

Benjamin saw now that it was a sort of small gipsy van, such as pedlars travel in, hung round with brooms, basket chairs, tin pails, carpet slippers, and other useful objects, and drawn, as he had known long since, by two little donkeys, one of which was dropping a shoe. On the driver's ledge, with the little door open behind them, showing an incredibly crowded interior, sat a young man and a girl. Benjamin could see their faces, how they were as like as their voices. Brother and sister, then.

They drew up at the forge, and said together, " Our smaller donkey is losing a shoe," and climbed down on to the road.

Benjamin lifted the smaller donkey's near fore-foot, and made his examination. He was by nature a young man of few words. Herein he differed from his customers, who were not like that. They said (and they really only stammered a little, after all, except when they were getting excited), "We're on our way to London. How far now? Oh, there's a milestone. Fifty-seven; that will take us five days. We don't go fast, you see; the donkeys aren't very strong; and we make long stops in the villages and towns, to sell things. Will you buy a pair of carpet slippers, with pink geraniums on them? Or perhaps a clothes-brush; you must get so much dust from the motors here. Or a bucket—or a little chair. Have you a little chair to sit in already? No, you haven't, apparently. It costs three and sixpence. But if you'd rather have the slippers . . . We want to stay just outside Cambridge to-night; that isn't far, is it? Is it a nice place, Cambridge? We don't know it much."

Benjamin Bunter, busy with a little shoe, selected this to answer.

"Nice? That's according to what you want out of it, I suppose." But his own feeling about it looked for a moment out of his candid, heavy-browed deep blue eyes. He, it seemed, had at one time or another got something he wanted out of Cambridge.

The pedlar people didn't altogether understand.

"We just want a nice place . . . a place we can play about in for a little . . . oh, not too respectable,

you know. We've just been at Ely, and that wasn't very comfortable. The people were rather t-tidy—and we aren't."

Benjamin looked at them and perceived that they were not. They were not even as tidy as he was. He, with his bare grimed arms and open shirt and leather apron, and far-set, very honest, grave blue eyes, was the self-respecting artisan, the noblest work of heaven. (That was what he believed the self-respecting artisan to be; I quote his sentiments, not his words, which were few and to the point, and not of that sort.) These pedlar people were probably not self-respecting; and their shoes were broken. Not that Benjamin Bunter thought less of them on that account; that was perhaps one of the things he had got out of Cambridge—indifference to broken shoes. Another was the unsurprised acceptance of incongruities. Broken shoes, brooms to sell, gentle speech—these went, in Benjamin Bunter's eyes, quite naturally together.

He finished the little shoe, and straightened himself.

"That's done . . . You were offering me things to buy, weren't you. The only thing I want is a kettle. Have you a kettle?" There was this about Benjamin Bunter: he invariably knew what he wanted, and, more, what he didn't want. Another difference from the pedlars, who wanted everything they saw. The more things the better; that is what makes life full and interesting; perhaps that was why the inside of the cart was so very full. So

they couldn't understand the blacksmith saying "the only thing I want." Why not slippers with pink geraniums? Why not a little chair? Why, in the name of cleanliness, not a tin basin, since smiths must get black?

However, since this smith was such an eclectie young man, and only wanted a kettle, a kettle he should have. So the search for the kettle began, outside and inside the crowded cart. Benjamin helped.

"You see," the pedlars explained, rummaging among layers of things that were not kettles, "we don't exactly know for certain whether there *is* a kettle. The fact is, it isn't our stock; we're peddling for a friend, who is in hospital. Of course there should be a kettle—l-lots of kettles—" (they stammered increasingly as they searched, because they were feeling anxious), "but one n-never knows what other people will have thought of putting in. If it was our stock, it would have been rather different. Fewer brooms, and more amusing things—and any n-number of kettles. They are so useful, aren't they? You can use them all the time, if you've a fire. That's why they're really better than brooms. . . . Tommy, there *is* no kettle."

That was the final ultimatum, given by the sister to the brother; and both gazed at Benjamin with melancholy eyes—great sad blue-grey eyes they had, beneath funnily expressive black brows.

"Thank you," said the blacksmith. "I am sorry to have given you the trouble."

"Nothing else will do, I suppose?" ventured the

sister, but with uncertain hope now, because they were getting to understand the sort of determined, know-his-own-mind young man they had to do with. "Nothing in enamel plates . . . or knives . . . N-nothing in . . . that's what they say in shops, you know. It's nicer than 'will plates do instead?'"

"Betty," the brother plunged (aside) into desperate renunciation, "he must have our kettle. We have one kettle," he explained to the smith. "You can have it."

The sister nodded agreement. "I'm afraid we mustn't say it costs very much," she added, a little sadly, "because it has a hole. A very little hole, and high up, above where the water comes, unless you fill it very full. It's a good kettle, but rather old. Have you found it, Tommy?"

Tommy had found it; he displayed it to Benjamin with some diffidence. "I think," he said, "it shouldn't be more than sixpence, because of the hole. Quite a little hole, you see."

Benjamin said, "Thanks, very much. But I won't take your . . . your private kettle; I'll wait, and get one in the village later."

They pressed him. They seemed engagingly to attribute his refusal entirely to consideration for them.

"Oh, but do. We don't want it, really. We can get one in Cambridge to-morrow. Cambridge must have lots of kettles. And you want one to use to-night. You must keep it."

"I don't want a kettle with a hole," Benjamin didn't (for some reason) say. Instead, with the beginnings of his slow smile, he produced sixpence and took the kettle from the young man's hands.

"But don't *you* want to use it to-night?" he questioned, taking the ground they had assumed for him.

They reassured him. "Not a bit. Oh no."

Then it occurred to Benjamin that they really must have a use for this kettle; otherwise why should they think that he had? He put it down.

"I think," he said, "I won't take it. Why should I have it, rather than you?"

This was an *impasse*. The blacksmith was determined, the pedlars were eager. Then suddenly one of them had an idea.

"Oh, why shouldn't we have supper together? Because of course we both want it for supper, don't we? Where do *you* have supper? Sometimes we go to an inn, and sometimes we have it by the roadside, if it's fine and we've got food. We've got some food to-night, and we were going to have it on the road. The kettle boils water for our cocoa —that's what we drink, most evenings. Oh, let's have it together, and then it won't matter about the kettle."

"But perhaps you were going somewhere else for supper—home or somewhere?" suggested the other pedlar.

"I was going to my cottage," said the blacksmith. "That little place there in the field—you see? I

live alone there. Will you come and have supper with me ? "

They said they would love to. So Benjamin locked up his forge, and the pedlars dragged their donkey-cart up the little rutty lane between deep may hedges to the gap which let one in to Benjamin's squat little white cottage.

" You cook and everything yourself ? " said the girl pedlar, as Benjamin put the kettle on a cooking stove and sliced ham into a frying-pan, with the same careful dexterity with which he fitted a shoe.

He answered casually " Yes," and added, perhaps defending himself from the touch of commiseration (as for fellow-sufferers) that he divined, " I like it." He did not add " Everyone should cook and everything for himself," though that was what he meant, because he had been learning during the last six months that there is a time to preach and a time to keep silence. But he was still a preacher at heart ; he knew, though he might (at times) refrain from saying, what was the better way.

" It means so much to do," said his guests, or one of them. (He soon came to perceive that it mattered very little which spoke; each voiced the sentiments of both.)

" Not more than one can get through," said Benjamin.

" N-no. But it leaves so little time, somehow. We're always glad when we can afford not to do it. Time is so important, isn't it? I mean, there are so many nice things to get into it that it seems such waste

to fill it up with the other things. So we try always to do the nice things first, and then see how much time is left for the others. Except of course when we're so hard up that . . . " The speaker broke off, thinking herself tactless. Probably this young man was always so hard up that . . . What a shame to rub it in.

" I expect," said the blacksmith, sizzling the ham, " that we look at things rather differently." That was obvious. Even a kettle with a little hole above where the water comes unless you fill it very full, they looked at quite differently. That is often a test.

But anyhow they all wanted their supper, and all enjoyed it when it was ready. There was one disappointment, however, even about the supper. The pedlars refused the ham, recollecting suddenly that it was Friday. They were apologetic. " We have to. We're Catholics, you see. Besides, we really don't want it ; we often just have bread and cheese in the evenings, or minestra or something." Benjamin took up the Italian word. " You're not Italian ? "

" Well, no. But we've lived there mostly. It's our home. Just now we're travelling in England. It's a funny country ; we rather like it. We used to think we hated it. But that was because we were educated there. If you just play, it's nice. Except for the weather, and having colds."

Benjamin, eating his ham, pondered silently over the reason why his guests could not share it. Being

a person who liked to understand things, he investigated the subject further, in his slow, impersonal, deliberate way.

"Is it possible to be a—a Catholic, and not bother about Fridays?"

The pedlars supposed it might be. "But *we* don't bother. It's what we're used to. And we're not very fond of meat. In Italy, you know, you eat much less meat always . . . But *you* keep the fasts too, in your church—some of you."

"Do we?" Benjamin knew nothing of that. "I don't belong to any church, you see."

His guests looked rather relieved. Those who belonged to no church or chapel were apt to look more tolerantly on Papists than were the ardent chapel-going Protestants who were unfortunately numerous in East Anglia, and who sometimes seemed to have a curious, vexed feeling about keepers of fasts.

The conversation turned on business.

"Can you," said Tommy (slowly Benjamin was beginning to discriminate between him and Betty, though any differences beneath the surface that there might be had not yet transpired), "can you give us the names of anyone in Cambridge who would be likely to buy things from us? We are very anxious to sell our stock, because our friend wants money rather badly. You saw the things we had . . ."

Benjamin nodded gravely. He gave the subject, as all subjects, his serious attention. Honestly he could not, among his acquaintances in Cambridge,

think at the moment of anyone particularly likely to be in want of carpet slippers or tin pails.

"But any of them might, of course," he said. "You can never tell. It just depends on what they happen to be out of at the moment."

"People just married," suggested Betty. "They always want things. Pictures, you know. Oh, you didn't see our pictures. Tommy does them; he's rather good."

"I do drawings," Tommy explained. "They're not much good. I get some of them into illustrated papers, and sell some on the road."

That, of course, was a different matter from carpet slippers.

"May I see some?" said Benjamin. So after supper Tommy fetched a portfolio out of the donkey-cart.

The drawings were clever, with the neat, practised cleverness of the professional. Also they were not without humour and charm. They were roadside sketches, mostly—village groups and portraits. A tendency to farce was sometimes indulged, sometimes repressed.

"Thank you," said Benjamin, after some time. "May I buy these three?" He had selected them with deliberation.

The artist was delighted, and named an absurdly small price. Benjamin advised him to ask more, in Cambridge.

"Cambridge can afford more. Yes, I can give you the names of some possible people." He wrote

them down, with addresses, and ended the list with his own name.

"You may like to mention me, because all those people are friends of mine; and before they see the drawings that may help. Benjamin Bunter, the Wattles blacksmith. You'll probably find St. Martin's the best college for the better drawings. The people there are more appreciative, on the whole, than in most of the other colleges. But for the—the more comic drawings, some of the other colleges would be as good—Norfolk, or St. Faith's, for instance. Don't, of course, mention my name except to the people on the list. It might be a pity, because some of the people in Cambridge who know me think I'm such an ass that nothing I admired could be good."

The pedlars nodded sympathetically. "Thank you, very much," they said. "Our name is Crevequer. We . . ." Music swung suddenly out of the night—the melody of the merry-go-round, raucous and romantic. The Crevequers became abstracted. Tommy leant out of the window to listen.

"A fair?" he enquired.

Benjamin nodded.

"It's feast week in Wattles. That'll go on till midnight." He looked resigned. But the Crevequers appeared to be thrilled.

"Thank you so much," said Betty, rising, "for our n-nice supper. It's been a splendid plan. And now, as it's a fair, we must go at once."

As Benjamin looked as if he didn't quite make the connection, they added, " Aren't you coming yourself ? "

" I don't," said the young man, " usually go to it."

" How funny. Why not ? Isn't it a good fair ? "

Benjamin looked a little dubious as he replied, " Oh, I expect so. But . . . it makes rather a noise . . . and a crowd . . . and swing-boats make me giddy, rather." Those were good normal reasons for not liking a fair, so he gave them.

Since the Crevequers loved a noise and a crowd, and considered that giddiness was a cheap price to pay for a ride in a swing boat, it was obvious that sympathies were here imperfect. The Crevequers accepted the explanation with an air of intelligent comprehension ; but Benjamin felt moved to clarify his position in their eyes ; he was so sincere a young man that he didn't like really to take his stand on any ground, however normal, that wasn't actually his. So, to the objections he might have felt to the fair, he added the one he did feel.

" People get tipsy, and racket about so late that it spoils their next day's work. That's stupid."

" I suppose it is." Politely they supposed so, but without enthusiasm.

The missionary in Benjamin leapt out.

" It's idiotic. It isn't worth it." He was very firm, not being sure that they agreed with him.

They didn't seem sure as to that, either.

" I suppose, though," ventured one of them, " it

must be worth it really—or they w-wouldn't do it." "And they have so many days' work," added the other, "that I suppose they feel they can spare one or two now and then, for the fair. I expect they enjoy their work all the more because of having a good time in between. Tommy and I do."

"You know," Tommy explained, when you're so hard up for a bit that you have to do rather a lot of work, it gets soon so that you can't bear it any more without a change or a rest. Then you go to a fair, and go in a swing-boat or something, and throw rings at alarm clocks (only you never get them)—well, or get tipsy, if that's the way you like—and you feel so much better afterwards."

"As long," said Benjamin, who had a fetich, "as one doesn't let things get in the way of one's work—that's all that matters."

This surprising statement touched the brother's and sister's rather mournful regard with bewilderment. A remarkable young man, this seemed, who saw everything an odd way round. As long, held the Crevequers, as you don't let your work get in the way of more things than need be—that was all that mattered. Since it was too large an issue to dispute, they wisely left it there, and parted with friendliness, Benjamin keeping the kettle at his guests' request.

"A fair, you know," they added, "is good business for us. People get excited, and buy s-slippers and things. Come along, Betty. Good-night, and thank-you most awfully. We shall try Cambridge to-morrow for the drawings."

So they went off to the fair and threw rings at clocks, but failed to secure anything but a salt-cellar, and spent a lot of money.

Benjamin washed up—an operation that rather interested him. He was an easily interested person. So were the Crevequers. Benjamin liked them, but thought them wrong about most things. He gathered that (so far as they worked at all, which perhaps wasn't saying much) they did but work because they must and toiled but as the linnets do. Well, as most people do, Benjamin would have admitted. But then most people, of course, are quite wrong. Benjamin, having a fetich, divided people into those who did work and liked it (Class I), those who did work and didn't like it (Class II), those who didn't do work though they needed the money (Class III), and those who didn't do work because they didn't need the money (no class at all). The Crevequers probably oscillated (according to how impecunious they were at the moment) between Classes II and III. The only class that really annoyed Benjamin was the last, and they manifestly didn't belong to that.

The chief object of Benjamin Bunter's ambition at this time was to put everybody into Class I. It was so sad that there should be any other classes at all. At present he had only succeeded in putting himself there; but he was occupied with a scheme for putting one other person there, out of Class II. It was proving rather a distracting business, involving a good deal of correspondence. For Benjamin

always tried to be considerate ; that is, to explain to the people who remonstrated with him why his way was the one good way. This was what he was preparing to do now, when, having washed up the leadless-glaze supper things and removed the cloth, he sat down at the table with letter-paper and a Waterman fountain-pen, and wrote, in his square, firm hand,

" My dear Mother,

" Thank you for your last. Perhaps, as you suggest, it would be a good thing that we should meet, in order to talk things over. If you would as soon come down here as that I should come home for the day, that would suit me best, on the whole. Only let me know when you will come. It would be very nice if you came to tea, say, on Monday." A pause here, during which Benjamin bit the end of the Waterman pen and frowned. When he frowned his thick black eyebrows met over his deep blue eyes and gave him the look of a worried infant scowling at an imbecile world. He added abruptly, " I have, I may as well say, quite made up my mind about this step, and I do not think we shall gain anything by discussing it. But, of course, I will explain anything in my position that is not clear to you, as I should naturally like you to agree with me. Your affectionate son,

" BENJAMIN BUNTER."

Pathetic, that last remark. For Benjamin Bunter's mother never had agreed with him about

anything, since the days when the baby Benjamin had taken off his baby shoes in his perambulator and surreptitiously dropped them overboard, on the grounds that shoes were not a necessity of existence, and that one should limit oneself to such things as were. His mother possibly agreed with the Crevequers—the more things the better, and especially unnecessary things, which are so pleasant.

When he had finished and directed his letter, Benjamin, settling himself in a wooden-seated chair with a sigh of relief, read somebody's " Theory of the Integral Calculus." He didn't smoke, because he didn't approve of expensive tobacco and didn't like cheap tobacco. Besides, why should one smoke ? Benjamin thought it an unnecessary habit. And when one had a book so interesting (although fallacious in some points, which Benjamin carefully noted on the margin) as the " Theory of the Integral Calculus" one didn't miss smoking.

But Benjamin was really a sociable person, so he laid down his book, after finishing a marginal note, with a pleasant smile, when a young man knocked and entered, and said, " What price the fair, Ben ? "

He said it without joviality. He didn't, in fact, look a jovial person. He was a very pale, thin young man, with narrow shoulders and bitter-looking lips, and an unhappy smile. When he said, " What price the fair ? " he seemed to be, in a manner, sneering at the fair.

Benjamin said " Sit down, Harry," and pushed a chair towards him, and shut the " Theory of the

Integral Calculus," because Harry Robinson demanded one's exclusive attention, and when he didn't get it, said, " Oh, of course, I'm not an interestin' feller," and went away and took quite a long time to get over it. Harry, in fact, was touchy ; and Benjamin, who was not, had learnt to be careful of him.

" Fair," repeated Mr. Robinson with a fresh access of contempt for it. " *Fair.*"

That seemed to be about all he had to say about it. He broodingly lit a cigarette, and sat in silence. Benjamin, to change the subject, said it had been a good meeting last night. Mr. Robinson, a little grudgingly, acknowledged it.

" But arterwards," he added, " things come to me as I might have said and didn't. Ways of puttin' the matter, as it were, that would have fair knocked 'em over. When Poulter was jumpin' on me about the factory laws, thinkin' 'imself so clever, why didn't I think of what come to me arterwards to reply ? "

Benjamin didn't ask what that was, having learnt that Harry, touched with jealousy, believed that the only way to reserve his good things for his personal use was to hide them secretly in his own soul. For the reply that had come to him too late for last night's Minority Report meeting would do for the next. They had them quite often in Wattles, now that Benjamin Bunter had settled there and had organised the Socialist Club.

Harry Robinson, changing the subject quickly,

lest Benjamin should pick his brains, left politics for the home, and said, "We 'alf looked for you to come and see us to-night. Louie 'alf looked for you."

"I'm sorry," said Benjamin. "I had some people in to supper, then a letter to write."

"Did you? What people might they be?" Harry Robinson took a pessimistic interest in his neighbours' concerns.

Benjamin told him they were people out of a pedlar's cart; and Mr. Robinson said, with his weary scorn, "Oh, them. I saw them. They was sellin' their trumpery articles at the feast, as I come through. Ought to be 'ad up, I say, for loafin' and vagrancy. Call *that* an honest liveli'ood. They were talkin' away—no better than they should be, I should say, if you ask me. A disgrace to the country, these pedlars and tramps—they're all one. An' better folks slavin' an' grindin' an' sweatin', an' killin' themselves to earn an honest penny. *They* don't know nothin' about work, people like that don't. . . . Oh, Lord, Ben, I'm fair sick of the whole show!"

He broke out suddenly, savagely, striking his thin hand on the solid oak table. It was when he was in this mood that he came to Benjamin Bunter, whose steady convictions were consoling. Benjamin's convictions were merely that a better time was on its way; that before very long no one would be slaving or grinding or sweating or killing himself, and no one loafing and disgracing the country. Work for all; overwork for none; a simple and engaging programme.

Benjamin was very sorry for Harry Robinson, who was overworked at the tanyard, and saw the world askew. He didn't enjoy life; and everyone ought to enjoy life. He was in Class II.

So was his sister Louie—a more estimable person, however, who didn't sneer, but took the world with patient amenity.

CHAPTER II

THE BUNTERS

THE Vicar of Wattles was writing notices for the forthcoming number of the parish magazine when Lady Lettice Bunter was announced to him.

"Never heard of her." said the Vicar, who often spoke aloud to himself. "We were most fortunate in our weather, and altogether had a most enjoyable day." The second "most" had to come out, and "very" was inserted instead. That done, the Vicar wrote "Choir Treat" at the head of the paragraph, and put it beneath a paper-weight, together with other paragraphs, headed respectively "C.E.M.S.," "Mothers' Union," and "Church Lads' Brigade." It was June, and these societies had all had most enjoyable days lately, and had all been most fortunate in their weather, and it was rather difficult to vary the reports of their doings. The weather was propitious, and we all agreed that it had been a delightful day (C.E.M.S.). The lovely weather contributed largely to the success of our day (Church Lads' Brigade). But the G.F.S. day hadn't yet been

reported on; the Associate who had undertaken to do it perhaps couldn't think of anything to say about it. It had only been yesterday; and it takes a little time to recover from these things. If one writes about them at once, one says, "The day was chaotic, and we cannot remember what happened, except that we all screamed a great deal; and now our heads ache, and we are exceedingly glad that our Festival is over for a year." But after a few days one gets better, and in a state to say "the weather was propitious."

Anyhow the Vicar had now to leave his literary labours and go to Lady Lettice Bunter, of whom he had never heard. He wasn't surprised that she should call on him; vicars are always having to see people of whom they have never heard. Perhaps she wanted a subscription.

The Vicar of Wattles was a large, pleasant man with shrewd grey eyes and amused lips. Lady Lettice Bunter was a tall, slim woman of great grace, with a rather lovely face and a plaintive voice. She was forty-six, and looked about thirty-eight. She said, "So good of you to see me. If I may ask you a few questions. . . . A matter I am much troubled about. . . . You know my son, of course."

The Vicar twisted his lips and tried to remember how and why he knew her son.

"My boy Benjamin . . . silly boy . . . a blacksmith, you know. So original in his ways—he *would* be a blacksmith. Directly he came down from Cambridge he started it. You know how it is when a

lot of silly young men get together talking. And my son is the most obstinate boy. He gets an idea, and nothing will move him. So he's a blacksmith. Here in Wattles, you know."

"Oh, yes. Stupid of me. I didn't think for the moment who he would be. He's never mentioned his family to me. Of course, I know him quite well. I believe he's an excellent blacksmith; they tell me so." He paused questioningly, waiting for the few questions she wished to ask him. If they were to be about Bunter the blacksmith, really she probably knew more than he did. He hadn't much knowledge of Bunter the blacksmith's private affairs; he only knew him to be a pleasant-mannered, cranky-headed young man, who refused (on principle, one gathered) to come to dinner, and refrained (on principle also) from coming to church, and got up socialist meetings in the village, and played cricket on Sunday afternoons, and was an excellent blacksmith. The Vicar had never heard any harm of the young man; and his curate, Diggs, had been by way of making friends with him. Diggs too was a socialist. He used to bring Bunter the *Church Socialist Quarterly* to read, and tell him of the splendid work done by the Church Socialist League.

"I wish you'd join it," he would urge. "You think it's a special brand of socialism, like weak tea —but it *isn't*. We stand for all the principles of the Fabian Society, the S.D.P., and . . ." and so forth. Diggs was used to hammering at stupid people who spelt Church Socialism with a hyphen.

But Benjamin wasn't one of those. He highly approved of the League, only you can't well join it unless you are a churchman. "But why aren't you?" said Diggs; and Benjamin would explain, at some length, as one's own theory of the universe is rather an interesting subject.

"It's all this silly socialism," said Lady Lettice Bunter. "They pick it up, you know, like measles. More particularly at St. Martin's—my son's college. Benjamin got a bad attack. So he's a blacksmith."

The Vicar nodded assent. "An unusual young man," he observed. "They don't as a rule become blacksmiths, however bad the attack."

"But Benjie has a fad about working with his hands," his mother explained. "He seems to think it's the only respectable sort of work a man can do. Anyhow he's sure it's the work for him; though he has a head too, really."

"There's plenty of head," said the Vicar, "comes into a smith's work. And you wanted to consult me . . . ." It was time for him to go out visiting, so he hurried her.

"Yes," said Lady Lettice, concentrating. She found it a little difficult, being vague—quite different from Benjamin. "About a young woman in your village. Louisa Robinson, the name is. Now what sort of a young woman is she?"

The Vicar, who was concise, said, "She works at the Enderby paper-mills. She is one of a large and very poor family; her father is an incompetent, her mother not strong, her only grown-up brother

something of a weakling and working too hard for his physique. Louie runs the family more or less. A hard-working gentle-mannered, rather delicate young woman of about five and twenty."

"Exactly," said Lady Lettice, a little faintly, "what I gathered from Benjie . . . It must be stopped, Mr. Dunstan. It cannot conceivably go on."

"No?" said the Vicar. "I expect you mean that your son and the young woman are becoming undesirably intimate. Is that so?"

She said simply, "He says he is going to marry her. He says nothing will stop him—not me, nor his father, nor anything. He is like that, you see. He makes up his mind to do a thing, and *does* it. And you see how unthinkable . . ."

The Vicar of course saw. "Curious," he mused. "I wonder why . . . She isn't beautiful, you know, the young woman——" but Lady Lettice interrupted. "Oh, dear me, Benjie wouldn't care if she was. He never does care for things like that. He's probably determined to marry her simply because she's a working-woman—and women *ought* to work, don't you know; so ought men, of course. And no class barriers, and so forth, and all classes to marry each other—so chaotic."

The Vicar nodded. "A remarkable young man. He appears to have a quite unusual habit of converting theory into action. Quite so. Then you don't think he—*cares* for Louisa Robinson exactly? Rather a marriage of principle than of affection?"

" Oh, well, you know, I've no doubt he's worked himself up into thinking he cares for her. But what he really cares for is the working-class as a whole ; this Louisa Robinson is merely a type to him." Lady Lettice seemed to know her son, however different from herself he might be.

" Well," the Vicar said, since time was getting on, " anything I can do to help . . . But I'm afraid it's scarcely my province, perhaps. It's not even as if either of them were definite Church members, you see. I shouldn't, in any case, have the marrying of them. Your son is a firm secularist, isn't he ? "

" Such a pity," said Lady Lettice. " I'm always speaking to Benjie about that. You couldn't, I suppose, do anything in that matter ? . . . Oh, well, never mind, that isn't the point at the moment, of course. About the young woman—somehow she must be detached. *I* can't do it ; I have been remonstrating with Benjie for weeks. So has his father. But he has been quarrelling with his father for the last six months, about this blacksmith business. Benjie always quarrels with well-off people when he can ; he doesn't like them. He's desperately ashamed of his family—coal-mines, you know, and of course they do bring in something. It can't be helped, of course. But the consequence is that what we say to him doesn't seem to have the least effect—the voice of the wealthy, the cry of the idle rich, and all that. What can one do ? It's no use cutting off his allowance, because he won't take a penny ever. Ill-gotten gains—battening on the

life-blood of the poor—that sort of thing, you know. Money is a crime ; one should give it all away and start fresh as a ploughman or a maid of all work, with nothing but a little leadless glaze ; no, not a maid of all work, because no one should keep maids at all. But—oh, well, of course you know the sort of thing. And when one belongs to the criminal classes, one's words have no weight. Now *you* . . ."

" I don't, certainly, belong to the criminal classes," said the Vicar, regretfully. " Except that I do keep maids, which he probably knows ; and not all my glaze is leadless. Those two facts are perhaps sufficient to deprive my words of their due weight. And I hardly, I fear, know him well enough to interfere."

" Vicars," said Lady Lettice, " have rights. Your own parishioners, after all. . . . If only he believed more in the Church ! Not that he doesn't think it a fine institution, you know, and all that, but he won't *come*. A free-thinker, like so many young men. . . . What I hoped was that you might deal with the Robinson family. Tell them, you know, how extremely unsuitable it is of them."

" They wouldn't agree with me," said the Vicar, firmly. " And really it would be, on my part, an extremely unsuitable interference. You see, I rather value any influence I may have in this place —one doesn't have much, you know—and I'm afraid I can't afford to throw it away like that . . . I'm very sorry, Lady Lettice. I hope you may have success yourself in this matter. You might interview

the girl, of course. She lives in the white cottage at the corner of the street by the church; only she won't be home from work yet. . . . May I suggest that you should be a little careful of her feelings—well, of course you would be. The Robinsons are a sensitive family—particularly the girl's brother, who is very easily put up in arms. A poor touchy fellow, with half a lung and a democratic soul. Don't put your objections too ostensibly on the grounds of class difference, I should recommend."

"Oh," said Lady Lettice, "these dreadful times! You do agree with me, don't you, Mr. Dunstan, that these disasters ought to be averted at any cost—that they are unmitigated calamities?" She was beginning to be doubtful whether he too wasn't a socialist—a church one, no doubt, but there are those who think that is worse.

"I never," said the Vicar, "generalise. I judge each case as it comes. And is any calamity unmitigated?"

He wasn't a socialist (because he never generalised) but he was unsatisfactory. People should generalise; otherwise where is the use of their experience?

The Bunter family all generalised; Lady Lettice said, "Mixed marriages are calamities" (and they aren't always); Benjamin said, "To work is the only claim to live" (obviously a lie, and badly put at that); his father said, "Boys are conceited apes" (certainly too sweeping); his brother Hugh, waiting in the motor car outside the vicarage, said, "Mother does manage to put in time wherever she goes,"

which was as nearly true as a generalisation can be expected to be.

Hugh Bunter was an extraordinarily good-looking young man of five and twenty. He wasn't in the least like Benjamin to look at; he hadn't got a square jaw and heavy brows and obstinate lips, but a fair pale face like Lady Lettice's, and well-cut features and a slim fine body, and a general air of putting up with nothing but the best. His theory of life was "Money is there to be spent" (another generalisation), and he shared Benjamin's habit of converting theory into action as immediately as might be. "Live and let live" was another theory of his; so he didn't see why all this fuss. If Benjie liked to be a blacksmith, and to marry one Louisa Robinson of Wattles—well, why not? As long as Benjie was pleased, and Louisa Robinson was pleased—really, that was all. He, Hugh Bunter, had other things to think of, anyhow. He shared neither his young cousin Cecil's unconsidered enthusiasm for Benjamin's principles and expression of them nor his parents' aversion. Hugh looked at things from a detached standpoint, and gave everyone his full liberty of thought and action. He was something of a cynic, but a pleasant cynic.

"The Vicar won't help me," remarked Lady Lettice, getting into the car. "Says it isn't his business. So tiresome of Benjie not to go to church. Then the Vicar could perhaps have said a word. . . . The young woman doesn't go either, it seems—to church, I mean. I suppose Benjie tells her she

mustn't. So they wouldn't even have the banns put up, I imagine, and that makes it difficult for the Vicar. . . . I expect that's the young woman's cottage."

"Another call?" asked Hugh. "She'll probably be out at work, you know, Miss Robinson. Suppose we go straight to Benjie's. I want tea."

"Well," said Lady Lettice, "so do I. And, of course, it would be no pleasure to see those people; most trying for them and me. I hear the young woman's brother is an anarchist or something, and flares up if you mention class."

"Sounds like Benjie himself. We won't mention class to either of them; we'll only mention tea. After fifty-seven miles in this dust——. There's the forge."

Benjamin came out of the forge to meet them. Motors were in bad taste, and battened on the life-blood of the poor; but he was pleased to see his mother and Hugh, being an affectionate boy. And it was as well to have the opportunity of thrashing the subject of Louie Robinson thoroughly out. Then there need be no more misunderstandings or discussions. Benjamin had a charming faith in the sweet reasonableness of human beings in general. It came from being so reasonable himself.

Lady Lettice said, "My darling boy! How poorly you look." Benjamin didn't; but she always said that now that he was a blacksmith, because she knew that he was overworking and underfeeding, and must therefore be poorly. According to her, as Benjamin

often explained to her (he was given to explanation) the great mass of our population must all be and look poorly. "I daresay they do, poor things," she said, vaguely. She seldom argued, but always, sweetly reasonable, accepted Benjamin's logic, as if it laid no burden on her.

They all three went up the lane to the white cottage, while the chauffeur took the motor away to be fed with petrol.

"Two hours from Hyde Park Corner, Benjie," said Hugh, who had driven himself.

"It's disgraceful," said Benjie, mechanically, warming the earthen tea-pot, "a dusty day like this. It's inhuman."

Lady Lettice said, "Darling boys, don't squabble just now about motors and dust; there isn't time. We have to be back for dinner, and so much to say!"

"Not very much really," said Benjamin, pouring in boiling water out of a shining, brand new kettle that had come by post yesterday. "I can explain to you quite shortly my point of view."

"For *me* to say, I meant," Lady Lettice amended, "not for you"; and Hugh smiled, but Benjamin only looked patient and thoughtful and absorbed, as he poured out tea into leadless glaze cups.

Then a sudden helplessness seemed to take Lady Lettice. There was so much to say that it all failed her. She turned for help to her eldest son. "Tell him, Hugh dear, what we all think about it."

"Is there any need?" Hugh asked. "You know, Benjie, don't you? If you must make

anything so vulgar as a mercenary marriage, you had so much better go for money than for the lack of it."

Benjamin nodded soberly, "Yes, I know what you all think about it. I got all your letters, you see, mother. And father's. I tried to explain to you in my answers what my point of view was. You did read them, didn't you?"

He had dutifully written pages, and it hadn't seemed to him that the arguments contained in them had always been carefully met in his parents' replies.

Hugh reassured him on that point. "They read them aloud at breakfast." He sighed a little.

"And don't you," said Benjamin to his mother, "see my point?" He was very anxious that his point should be seen; it was such an obviously reasonable one.

"Oh, my dear," said his mother, "I remember all you've said about it. Men must marry, to populate the country (as if there wasn't too large a population already, so that crowds have to emigrate by every boat), and the best people should do it rather than the worst."

"Yes," said Benjamin. "That is, the industrial part of the population rather than the idle."

"And we should all marry out of our class. . . ."

Benjamin frowned. "I never said that. I never mentioned class at all. I said, and I maintain, that we should all marry the hardest workers we know."

"Of course, we can't *all* do that," his mother gently corrected (she had occasional flashes of

accuracy) ; " you aren't always quite exact, darling, are you? But never mind that; I see what you mean, of course. Only aren't you just a little young to marry *anyone*, dearest child ? "

" No," said Benjamin. " Men of my age constantly marry."

Lady Lettice remembered that they did, in what she was not allowed to call the working classes, so she renounced that point.

" But Benjie, dear, what about love ? Oh, I know you don't like me to talk about that, but I must, for once, and you must try and not be a prude, darling."

He was not succeeding in this endeavour, apparently ; he was blushing all over his square brown face. Love wasn't one of the things one talked about at tea ; perhaps one didn't talk about it at all. But his mother, an unreticent lady, persisted in doing so.

" You see, dear boy, later on, when you are more grown up, you may become fond of someone. Then *what* a pity that it should be too late ! You see, don't you? You're too young to know what love is—but in a few years . . . There are so many nice girls, you know, of your own sort."

" My sort ? " Benjamin interrogated. " I am a blacksmith. I am going to marry a mill-hand. That is my own sort. The nice girls you (I presume) are referring to don't marry blacksmiths. The working-classes," he was quoting her against herself, " should marry among themselves." He had successfully

steered the conversation from love, which embarrassed him.

"Oh, my dear, you speak as if you were always going on with this blacksmith silliness! It will pass off——" she was reassuring him, as if it was influenza, "and then you'll fall in love with some nice girl. Not a *rich* girl, perhaps; there's no need for that, and you don't like rich people, I know; but there are so many charming girls with no money, but with breeding. Aren't there, Hugh?"

"Presumably." Hugh was more interested at the moment in the drawings on Benjie's chimney-piece than in charming girls. He didn't want to talk about love either; it was rather boring and a trifle bourgeois. And it was nearly time they started back to town.

But Lady Lettice returned to the charge with unwonted pertinacity.

"Now, Benjie, tell me honestly. Do you *love* this (I've no doubt very nice and good) girl? Or is it *merely* that you feel you must marry the hardest worker you know? Though if you come to that I'm sure I know plenty of girls who work quite as hard, doing things at home, and going out, and all that. There's Doris Overton, now, always looking after her mother, who's so provoking, poor thing, and doing all the flowers herself, and seeing after everything, and writing notes, besides all the golf she has to play, and debating societies and things—she seems always in a rush. . . . But I daresay she wouldn't have you; in fact, she can't

leave home at present. . . . But never mind her; what I want to know is, do you *care* for this Louisa? Now don't look cross, Benjie, but think and tell me."

Benjie did look a little cross, but said simply "Of course I do, mother. That is naturally one of the points I have taken into consideration. It would be ridiculous not to. In my opinion, people ought not to marry without caring for each other."

Lady Lettice sighed, and had another flash of logic. "Then, in your opinion, people who can't care for the hardest worker they know oughtn't to marry at all. Really, Benjie, if your object is to continue the population——! You don't always think things out, darling, do you. Well, never mind. . . . I hear the young woman has a brother, a sort of demagogue person."

"How do you hear that?" asked Benjie.

"Your Vicar. Oh, yes, I've been calling there. Such a picturesque old church. Why don't you go to it, Benjie? The Vicar seems a very pleasant person, but not effective. No control over his people; one would think that was a Vicar's business, but he thinks not."

"I'm sorry you should have asked him to interfere with my concerns," said Benjamin. "If you had asked me first, I could have told you that was no good. He isn't a meddler. I like him."

"Rather clever, these drawings," said Hugh, because Benjie seemed to be getting a little sulky, and Hugh didn't like unpleasantness. "Who did them?"

Benjamin was not attending to him. He attended to one thing at once, always. He stood before his mother with his hands in his pockets, and looked gravely down at her, and said, "I am going to marry Louie Robinson on the tenth. It is all settled."

Lady Lettice cried, "Oh, darling—why the tenth?" to gain time; then she got up and put her arms round him and said, "Benjie, I *ask* you . . . for my sake . . . "

Benjie said, "Mother, please don't," and for once himself turned from argument to pleading. "I ask you, for *my* sake, to be nice to her. To make no difference. To try and like her. Anyhow, to be kind."

Lady Lettice cried a little then. "When I see you making such a terrible mistake—such a mess, darling, of your life . . . what can I do but try and prevent it? But of course when its actually done—if you actually must do it—it will be no good making a fuss any more; and you've never found me disagreeable to you yet, have you, dear? But I must warn you that father is coming down to see you. I said I would try first—I and Hugh—not that Hugh is doing much—and if I failed, he would come and see you himself, and literally forbid it."

Benjamin was looking displeased. "It is such a pity," he said, "that father should take this line. It is no use. I have told him it is no use. I will tell him again. I am frightfully sorry you and he mind so much, mother; but it has to be done."

When Benjamin spoke in that voice, it really did

seem no use. Lady Lettice sighed and kissed him, and said they had to start home now. Hugh, detached to the last, went out to see after the car. When he came back he said, "We shall have to do it in an hour and fifty minutes. I am frightfully sorry you mind, Benjie, but it has to be done, because of dinner. Goodbye. Who did the drawings? They're clever."

"A pedlar," said Benjie, "in a donkey-cart. It will be no use you or father seeing or writing to the Robinsons, by the way, mother, because you won't be able to influence them. Perhaps you didn't mean to; if not, I beg your pardon. But, anyhow, it would be no use. Goodbye, mother." He kissed her very affectionately. He was extremely fond of her, and hated all this distress he was causing.

"Quite clever," said Hugh, examining them.

"Oh, Hugh," said his mother, "what *do* the pictures matter? You haven't helped me at all. Can't you tell Benjie what *you* think about all this?" Hugh looked at his watch. "We shall have to do it in an hour and forty minutes, then. I don't mind, if Benjie doesn't. What I think? Well, it's so extremely obvious, besides not being my business. But as you like, mother. What I think is that Benjie proposes to take what may or may not be a sensible step—no one can tell till they see it working, of course—but from the most entirely ridiculous motives. It may or may not be a success; but Benjie doesn't deserve that it should be. He is making the only hopeless mistake—putting individuality

underneath a cause; doing a thing not because he wants to but because he thinks he ought to want to; trying to bring a particular case under the laws that in his opinion (of course he's quite wrong about that, too, by the way) govern the universe. You can't do that. It can't be done. Particular cases aren't under general laws; they're much too important individually to be suborned in support of a principle. So, in fact, there are no general principles; or if there are they're singularly in the air. And least of all there are general principles where people are concerned. People are so much more important than any cause; they aren't under laws; they make laws. When what they call the personal factor comes in, it simply gets up and upsets the whole show. So Benjie is an ass.

"That's all I think. I am sorry to have had to bore you with it, Benjie. . . . I should rather like to come across that pedlar; he has a sense of humour. I like his cow. Goodbye, Benjie, and try to think better of it and not to be absurd."

"Goodbye, Hugh. Goodbye, mother dear."

He watched them get into the car and start, at the rate of fifty-seven miles in an hour and forty minutes, and the white dust surged behind them.

Benjamin sighed as he saw the dust. He was ashamed for them. Hugh didn't allow general laws, or any other laws, to govern his motoring; each mile of the road he dealt with as it came, on its own merits. He really had a general principle about not being a nuisance on the road, because he was pleasant

and kind ; but when any particular case turned up, and principle or case had to go to the wall, it was the principle that went. Hugh went through life with a serene, unworried tranquillity, taking things easily because they didn't have to square with one another. He was an empiricist.

Benjamin wasn't. He said, principles not incidents. Benjamin was an appalling generaliser. There, for the moment, he seemed to be alone. The vicar of Wattles judged each case as it came ; and Hugh said there were no principles ; and the pedlars in the donkey-cart said . . .

Benjamin, looking at the new kettle, couldn't imagine them saying anything about it ; they would think it so obvious, and there were so many nice things to do in the brief time at their disposal that they couldn't spare any of it to theorise in.

There was one element in this affair that Benjamin had perhaps made too little of in his discussions with his family, being a reticent boy. The consequence was that they all took the ground that this was not at all an affair of the affections, but of pure principle. As a matter of fact, why shouldn't it be both ? In fact, it must be both, since pure principle said that one mustn't marry without affection. Benjamin had said baldly, " It is naturally one of the points I have taken into consideration " ; but he couldn't go further than that, and explain to them the feeling he had for Louie Robinson—a feeling so tender, so reverent, so chivalrous, that to allude to it as a point he had taken into consideration was really quite inexpressive.

Benjamin went to see Louie that evening, and they met on the warm, dusky road outside the Robinson's cottage. He gave her some mignonette that he had picked out of his tiny garden for her, and said, "Will you marry me next Saturday instead of the tenth?"

Her pale face and patient brown eyes glimmered out of the dusk.

"As you like, Ben," she said. In her gentle voice, the remarkable Cambridgeshire intonation was softened and refined. "That do seem soon," she added.

"Yes," said Benjamin; "it does seem rather soon. But there are reasons why it is better."

"You had visitors this afternoon, didn't you?" she said. "In a car."

Benjamin said it had been his mother and his brother. Louie mused over this.

"To think of they coming in a car," was the result of her meditations. "They've got money, haven't they, Ben?" He hadn't so far told her anything about them.

He had to tell her now. "Yes, they are fairly well off."

Louie knew of an analogy. "There's Gertie Poulter's uncle keeps a big establishment in Birmingham, with fifteen young ladies. He come down in his fur coat. Lor! Don't it seem funny!"

The inequalities of this world; no, Benjamin, less detached than Louie, denied their humour. "They can't last, you know," he told her; but she, something of a fatalist, sighed.

" I dunno. 'Arry and you talk away—but I say things don't change much. An' why should they ? "

Here her education was defective ; Benjamin was trying to instil into her a healthy impatience. If Hugh had been there he would have felt no remains of doubt as to why Benjie was marrying Louie Robinson. For Benjie was a born missionary, and here was a pupil ready to his hand, docile, not unintelligent, and unconscious even of her need of enlightenment. More light, was Benjamin's cry ; and he began to kindle the flame of knowledge for her here on the twilight road. He often did ; that was the form their conversation took.

" He's a queer lad," Louie often said of her lover, with no depreciation. " He's like 'Arry ; he thinks everything matters an awful lot. But it don't," added Louie, out of her profounder wisdom and three extra years ; " not much."

In return for his instruction this evening, she told him presently, " Dot's bad to-night."

Dot was twelve, and had tuberculosis in the hip, for which she had periodical operations in hospital. There wasn't enough money to send her away to a home ; there wasn't even enough money to feed her properly. She was coming to live with Benjamin and Louie when they were married ; that would be better for her. For Benjamin could afford better food than the Robinsons could ; he had a little money of his own, left him by a godfather, besides his earnings. It was that that gave him his sublime independence of his parents and the coal-mines.

"I'm sorry," Benjamin said, his forehead contracting a little. He hated Dot to be bad; she was such a small weak thing, and pain was so horrible. When he had charge of Dot he meant to do the very best for her that could be done; but that wasn't very much, he was afraid. The sorrows of the world were oppressing him more than usual this evening; possibly it was the effect of Lady Lettice and Hugh and the motor.

"It will be better when we have her at the cottage," said Benjamin, characteristically hopeful. He was always saying about evils, "They will be better when . . ." and Louie always answering, as now, "Well, I dunno," The Robinson family were pessimists. Only, while Harry railed at fate, Louie accepted it without complaint, as life.

"I am glad we are going to marry so soon," said Benjamin. The vicar, passing close to them, thought, "Poor lady. A fruitless afternoon's work, obviously;" but only said "Good-night."

Benjamin said, "Oh, may I speak to you please. Good-night, Louie—" and left her, and walked at the Vicar's side.

"About my mother this afternoon," said Benjamin. "I'm extremely sorry she bothered you."

"She didn't," said the Vicar. "I was delighted. But no use, I fear."

The boy was even younger than he had thought; one has to be very young to apologise (with a blush) for one's mother.

"Naturally not. I told her you weren't like that."

"But I'm not sure I'm not, do you know, now I come to think of it. I should like to interfere with you, I believe—but what's the use?"

"None, of course . . . You think I'm wrong, then?" said Benjamin with indifferent curiosity.

"Wrong? Now, how should I think so—or that you're right? These complicated cases—one leaves judgment to those familiar with all the data."

"Do you quarrel, then, with the general principle involved?"

"Oh, I never quarrel with general principles. It's like fighting air. There's so much, you see, not by any means air, that one has to fight; and if one is naturally a man of peace . . ."

"You seem to share my brother's position about principles," said Benjamin, a little bitterly, because the world was an unprincipled place.

"I should think it improbable," said Mr. Dunstan, who had seen Hugh in the car. "Though, as my no doubt interesting position is not precisely clear to me, and your brother's even less so, I can't say for certain."

"Oh, Hugh's an empiricist of a sort."

"I see. Perhaps I am an empiricist of another sort—perhaps of no sort at all. You see, I'm not young enough to know. . . . Will you come in? No? Then good-night."

Benjamin went home. He had no patience with empiricists of any sort; it was such a lazy, incoherent thing to be. But the Vicar, of course, could not be one, because vicars are Christians, and

Christians aren't empiricists ; they at least have to know where they think they are going and why ; they at least must believe in causes, and (in principle, if not in practice) lay everything, personal or otherwise, at the cause's feet.

That, at least, was Benjamin's idea of what Christians did ; but, being an honest person, he would have admitted ignorance of the subject.

CHAPTER III

THE ONE AND THE MANY

BENJAMIN BUNTER'S cousin Cecil and his brother Jerry, setting out from their respective colleges, met opposite St. Theodore's Church, and bicycled out along the road to Wattles. They were nineteen; and they had wavy brown hair and pale attractive faces, like the faces of clever babies, and broad foreheads and intelligent hazel eyes that dreamed quite different dreams; Jerry's dreams being of things as he found them (because he was a poet, or actualist) and Cecil's of things as she meant to make them (because she was a reformer, or theorist).

This was their first term at Cambridge; so it was good of them to spare time and interest to Benjamin.

They discussed more important things as they bicycled to Wattles. Cecil said she had signed the articles of the Fabian Society yesterday.

"I wonder when you're going to, Jerry."

Jerry said the Fabian Society had nothing to do with him; he wasn't interested in that sort of thing. His gentle, tranquil way of making such remarks

could annoy nobody. But Cecil said, "You'll come to it. All respectable people must, if they think at all."

Perhaps Jerry wasn't a respectable person; or perhaps he didn't think at all. At the moment he was thinking how illimitably the horizons of grey and brown land stretched to east and west. It takes some months of residence in Cambridgeshire to get used to that thought.

"Anyhow," Cecil added, "it was silly of you not to come last night and hear Alec Potts. He was frightfully good."

Jerry said he had been attending a lecture on stained glass at the Arts and Crafts Society, so couldn't come to Alec Potts. "Besides," he added, "I was afraid he might be raucous."

"You might have survived it," said Cecil, "if he had been. But he's the gentlest person—little and fat and shy, and looks extraordinarily dull till he speaks. . . . I should like Louie to hear him, because he's so hopeful. I want to make Louie hopeful, don't you. . . . Oh, you were there on Sunday, weren't you? How were they?"

Jerry considered. "All right, I think."

"What did you talk about?"

Jerry tried to remember. "Oh, I think I was telling Benjie about the last Clark lecture, partly. And he told me about those pedlars who sent him the kettle and the rabbit. They do such nice drawings. I want to get hold of them. They came to St. Martin's last June, and sold drawings to people.

Some of them are extraordinarily nice. They did those of Benjie's—you know ? "

"I know. That ripping cow, and the village green. Does Louie care about them ? "

" I don't know, I don't remember that she said anything about them."

Cecil frowned. " But Jerry—you musn't ! "

" What ? " Jerry looked from the horizons in surprise.

" Mustn't let Louie not say anything about things."

" Oh. But why not ? And I don't see that I can very well help it, can I ? " Jerry was tranquilly surprised.

" Louie doesn't mind, you know," he added. " I always suppose she likes it better, not talking. She's a sort of quiet person, isn't she ? One never feels she's left out, because she's always busy with something or other. In fact, one doesn't remember that she's there most of the time."

" I know you don't. That's what I mean—you must remember that she's there. I don't know whether she minds or not, but anyhow that's not the point."

" I should have thought," said Jerry, " that it was the only point."

" Well, it isn't. The point is that we're spoiling the whole idea—Benjie's splendid idea—if we don't let her in. That's the scheme, don't you see ; and we've got to help it on." Cecil always found it an inspiring occupation, helping on Benjie's splendid ideas.

"To let her in—" Jerry mused over it. "But we do, don't we? Only she doesn't come in. It's her, isn't it?"

"It's us too. We ought to drag her in. Oh, we can talk about drawings and Clark lectures as much as we like—the more the better, I daresay—only we've got to make her talk about them too."

After a pause for reflection Jerry enquired, "Why? I never like it when people try to make me talk about Free Trade. You wouldn't like it if Louie made you talk about housework. Benjie doesn't like it when people try to make him talk about hunting. So why should Louie have to talk about our things?"

"It's the idea," Cecil repeated. "Of course it's a difficult idea; but its awfully fine. The equality idea, don't you see? I mean, you can't have a democracy till we can all come easily into other people's lives and interests. . . ."

Jerry said, "But there is no equality, in your sense. You seem to mean unanimity—many minds with but a single thought—and that's too dull ever to be true. If democracy means that, it would be horrible to have it. But if you want it, the shortest way is for you to come into Louie's life and interests, not her into yours."

Cecil sighed. "I believe I would, if I could. But it's awfully difficult, Jerry. You don't know, because you don't try; you just leave it alone and don't bother. But I'm going to be friends with Louie, somehow or other. Only I'm such a duffer at her things, and she doesn't care much about mine yet. Oh, it'll be all right in time, of course."

"It's perfectly all right now," said Jerry, contentedly looking over the autumn fields. They were coming into Wattles, and Jerry loved Wattles.

Cecil said, rather crossly, "Jerry darling, you're quite old enough now to stop thinking everything's all right always. It isn't, you see."

"It's usually good enough," said Jerry, "not to bother about." Which was just where Hugh and Jerry differed from Benjie and his disciple Cecil.

"I believe in taking things as they come," said Jerry, as they pushed their bicycles up the lane behind the forge. "Things and people."

"I know you do," Cecil had only time to return. "For a boy with a head, your beliefs are the most futile. . . ."

Then Louie opened the cottage door, and they went in. Benjie was there too, and little Dot Robinson, and Mr. Robinson her father, who had called in. Mr. Robinson was out of work (parchment) just now; he sometimes was. At these times Benjie and Louie saw a good deal of him. He was rather a nice man, with gentle brown eyes like Louie's, but his mouth, beneath his unkempt beard, was weaker than hers.

So they were a largish party; but as they all had nice manners they settled down agreeably. They talked, of course, about the election, because there was just going to be one. Mr. Robinson was a radical; Benjie and Cecil put not their trust in parties; the party system was a futile relic of barbarism, and one party very nearly as bad as the other; Louie believed Benjie; and Jerry didn't hold with politics.

Mr. Bunter senior was standing as a conservative in East Norfolk, which wasn't right, or course, but he was too old to know better.

" Hugh's helping, with the new motor," said Cecil, disparaging Hugh and the new motor, though one couldn't disparage one's cousin's father to them, however benighted. For Hugh wasn't too old to know better ; in fact, he probably did know better, only Hugh was devoid of principles.

Mr. Robinson, whose interests were local, said, " Cotton's the man. Cotton's the chap. Ay." Cotton was the chap who was standing in the liberal interest for West Cambridgeshire.

Benjie said, " Well, it'll be a near thing, I should say."

Louie said, " There's a rare lot of cars about. A proper fuss they make, don't they? "

Jerry said, " Oh, good. Raspberry jam for tea."

Cecil said she was going to stand at the polls and help to get signatures to a suffrage petition.

Mr. Robinson said, " No ; are ye now? The Vote. Well now, what d'ye want with a vote ? I'll be bound Louie'd have no use for that, would you, Louie ? "

Louie said, " Lor ! They do make a rare fuss, them ladies in London, don't they? "

It seemed that her attitude towards the world's problems was detached ; they were rather a spectacle to her than anything with which she was concerned.

All respectable people, of course, want the vote ; so Cecil, with an eye to Louie, answered Mr Robinson's

question, taking pains to be lucid and slow, because Benjie had told her that she talked much too fast for Louie as a rule, particularly when she was interested. The chief point she was anxious to explain was that one would of course be satisfied with no mean Conciliation bill, no playing into the hands of the aristocracy. Democracy before sex; adult manhood and womanhood suffrage, no less. . . .

Mr. Robinson moved on the lower levels. He even said, "Votes. Husbands, that's what I say. Eh, Louie?"

Cecil, who had gathered vaguely from Benjie that the Robinsons were an enlightened family (though as a matter of fact Benjie had never used this adjective to describe them), blushed, and looked at Louie to see what she made of her father. Nothing much, it seemed; Louie was putting milk in the second cups of tea. Benjie was looking on with a curious, doubtful expression. Jerry looked bored, and his eyes, meeting Cecil's, conveyed, "How can you raise subjects that open doors to such vulgar inanity? And you see it's no good; she won't be let in."

At that Cecil was goaded into. "I say, Louie, you *are* on the right side, aren't you?"

Louie was busy with the tea-pot. Benjie was pouring in hot water for her, and she was anxious that he should stop at the right moment.

"Cecil is asking," Benjie told her, as he replaced the kettle, "whether you want a vote."

Benjie often had to interpret Cecil, who talked too

fast, and assumed that those she addressed had been listening to the previous conversation—a double error ; one should only do one of these things at once.

To the question thus clarified, Louie replied, " A vote ? Why, Ben and 'Arry say we must have them ; and I'm sure I don't mind. That don't make much difference, as I can see."

" Oh dear," said Cecil, " you're as bad as Jerry. Don't you like to be in things, not out of them ? It's so—so much jollier. Don't you hate having to watch a hockey match ? It's so cold and dull, and you want to be playing so frightfully badly. It's like that with politics, don't you think ? "

But, as Louie had never watched a hockey match, she didn't know. She smiled at Cecil with her indulgent, patient eyes, that comprehended either everything or nothing, and repeated her formula, " Well—I dunno."

There was something at once baffling and baffled about Louie. It was as if, giving up all solutions of immediate problems, she fell back on some wisdom of the ages. By her side the three Bunters had the air of intelligent babies eating slices of bread and raspberry jam.

Cecil sighed, and puckered her large child's forehead. Not politics, then. And not hockey matches. And not making horse shoes, because Jerry was talking about that to Benjie now, and when Cecil said she was awfully keen to learn how, and asked Louie if she could do it, Louie said—well, said she couldn't, and implied she didn't want to. Not to want to play

with soft white iron, bending it about like putty—a curious person, Louie. Cecil wondered what she did want to do.

As she wondered, Benjie, who was fond of playing with his kettle, spilt boiling water over his hand ; and Louie, turning suddenly as white as a white rabbit, caught in her breath and upset her chair backwards, and ran to him, and held the scalded hand between hers and cried, "Oh, the vaseline out of the cupboard, quick," then got it herself, and spread it on, and bound it round with a handkerchief. Then she looked up into Benjie's face with brown, tender eyes ; and Cecil, seeing her look, was suddenly caught right out of the world of ideas into some other world, more direct, more simple, more coherent, more intense. The only awkward thing about it was that it wasn't the Bunters' world ; they remained in their own. What would be the result if a chess-player's pawns up and said they were alive, and must count as persons, not as pawns at all ? The player might return imploringly, "Can't you be both, then?" and they would probably say they couldn't, and so either the game or the pawns would abruptly cease to be.

Anyhow, Cecil wondered no more what Louie cared for ; she cared for Benjie.

Jerry said, " Now shall we look at the rabbit ? " and they all went out into the little garden and gazed at the rabbit in his house. He was a single rabbit, because, as Louie put it, they do increase so, rabbits do. He had come in a hutch by rail, with a wife, addressed to Benjie, with a note round his neck,

" Would you like to have our rabbits ? They aren't happy in London. They are called Umberto and Elena." Elena was given to a kind home, and Umberto was established in the cottage garden and fed with cabbages, and Benjie cleaned out his hutch regularly.

" They give a rare lot of bother, rabbits do," Louie had said. Benjie, if he had been asked face to face " Would you like a rabbit ? " as he had been once asked, " Would you like carpet slippers or a tin basin ? " would have said no. But the fact of there being no one to say no to—not even an address—hampered him. He felt responsible for Umberto, thus thrust confidently at him out of an irresponsible world wherein he had no part. So Umberto sat in the garden, and twitched his nose, and the Bunters looked at him and judged him.

" Eats 'is 'ead off, 'e does," said Mr. Robinson, disparagingly.

" I haven't yet thought of a job one can put him to," said Benjie, who would have liked Umberto to be in Class I (those who did work and liked it).

" Rabbits," Cecil decided, after watching him, " have very few interests beyond cabbage."

" I wouldn't keep him shut up," said Jerry. " Wild rabbits are nicer."

Louie said, " Wild rabbits in my vegetable bed ! " and added that Dot was fond of Umberto, so she supposed it was all right.

" Oh, I'm fond of him myself," said Benjie ; ' only I wish I could put him to a job."

"Eats 'is 'ead off, 'e does," said Mr. Robinson.

"But Mr. Robinson," said Cecil to Jerry as they rode home, "is as bad as Umberto. Why doesn't Benjie put *him* to a job?"

"Oh. I don't suppose he likes jobs," said Jerry, tolerantly. "He's getting old; he must be fifty or sixty. It's awfully sad for a man of that age to have to go on working, when I daresay he never liked work. I shan't work after I'm old; I shall sit about like that, and have lots of time."

"You do now," said Cecil, with contempt. "Just like that . . . I wish Louie would call us by our names. It's all wrong as long as she shirks that. All this is such a splendid opportunity, Jerry; and I feel as if we were somehow missing it, or not making the most of it. I wish 'Arry liked us more. It's so stupid of him. As if it was our fault——"

"Oh, but I don't think I like him much; do you? Because of his expression, you know; and the way he talks. He's such a discontented sort of man."

"So would you be if you were him. You've no business to dislike him. He's every business to dislike us, because we stand for all the hateful things that spoil his life. Only he ought to see that we're trying to disconnect ourselves; that what we really want to stand for is something quite different."

Cecil and Benjie were always standing for something; they perhaps took after Mr. Bunter the elder, who, too old to know better, was even now standing for East Norfolk, on the wrong side.

Jerry watched the lights of Cambridge, beacons

over the dark plains. Was the effect of Cambridge to merge personality in causes? And were people units, or did they really come each heading a great army like unto themselves only more so, so that one must accept or reject the person on the merits of his background of myrmidons? People opened doors into ideas; that was certain. But did the ideas matter because of the people, or the people because of the ideas?

Cecil was sure; but Jerry wasn't, and was too young to speculate much. Everything that was beautiful mattered, and nothing that wasn't; that was all Jerry knew. And for beauty one wanted form and colour rather than abstractions; Jerry was no Platonist. And beauty was permanent—the One that remains, while the Many change and pass. Both Cecil and Jerry knew that; the only question was, which was the One and which the Many? Was it people that stood in the white radiance of eternity, beyond the dome of many-coloured glass that prisoned and held the fluctuating chaos of ideas? Or was it ideas that thus transcended humanity's bounds and shone as fixed stars in an eighth heaven, to steer the ships by?

That might be an immeasurably important question; it probably was. But at the moment the only question the Bunters were confronted with was, where were their lights? One can never answer this; pedantically considered, it is an enquiry not well worded; for in what sense can a light not called into existence be said to be yours? Jerry, who was

disproportionately worried by incorrect language, said, "I don't know what you mean. We have no lights, just now. I suppose what you mean is, why haven't we? That is because we didn't bring our lamps with us, not knowing we should be out so late." Having thus satisfied their feeling for precise expression, they gave their names and addresses.

"I like bobbies," said Cecil in a few minutes, as they got on again. "They're so splendidly in the right."

But Jerry said, "I suppose there are bobbies and bobbies," which seemed to open again the eternal question, between the bobby *per se* and the bobby in his representative capacity.

CHAPTER IV

FORTUNE'S WHEEL

THE Crevequers came home to their lodgings in Page Street a little before midnight on the evening of the fifth of April. They had engagements at the moment as members of the chorus in a musical comedy; that is to say, Tommy had every evening to wear a top hat and a frock coat and stand in a row with eleven other gentlemen; and from time to time all twelve stepped forward and lifted their hats from their heads and echoed in unanimous melody some asseveration of a principal character's, altering the personal pronoun from the first to the third. It was a very simple and not unamusing way of earning money. Betty's function was similar, only she wore a sunbonnet instead of a top hat. Then at the end gentlemen and ladies all danced round the stage, and the evening ended in harmonious gaiety. The Crevequers were very lucky to have got this job, though it was only temporary. What with it and with Tommy's sketches, life was running fairly easily; and the Crevequers never looked ahead more than a week, because things were sure to turn up.

They came home to-night a little tired but well-fed, having been to a supper party given by another chorus gentleman and lady to celebrate their marriage. They let themselves into their home, entered their tiny sitting-room, which, in the words of one of their favourite classics, was as dark as hell and smelt of cheese, turned on the gas, and found a letter on the floor. The Crevequers liked getting letters; they approached them with the freshness of anticipation of the very young. This one was for Tommy, who opened it, read it through, put his hand to his brow after the manner of stage heroes, and said, "Let us try and understand." He sat down on the table to tackle the subject seriously, and Betty sat by him, and both tried to understand, and their two faces, with their knitted black brows, and smiles tucked away as momentarily irrelevant, were as alike as two musical comedies.

They both understood simultaneously, and looked up and met each other's eyes.

"D-do you see?" enquired Tommy, stammering excitedly. "He's dead, our Cousin Arthur is, and he's l-left us all his money. All. It says all, Betty."

Betty nodded, and the tucked-up smile broke into a dimple. "Tommy!"

That was all she could say for the moment. They sat on the table and chuckled at one another.

"Thousands and thousands of pounds," said Betty, at last. "How f-frightfully nice of him, though. I suppose he had no other relations. Or

perhaps he knew we needed it most. I didn't know he was dead, did you, Tommy ? "

" I'd forgotten that he was alive. But I remember him now, quite well, don't you ? Those holidays we stayed with him—years and years ago. He must have liked us, Betty. Did we like him ? I can't remember. But his house was jolly. Oh, that was where we rode the pigs, I believe. All over the lawn and the flower beds—and the gardener was a stupid man."

" I remember. No, Tommy, Cousin Arthur didn't like us. He never asked us again after that. I expect he liked father or something—or perhaps he'd forgotten about the pigs when he died. I suppose really there was no one else he could possibly leave it to. But how awfully nice of him to think of us ! Oh, I wish we could thank him, don't you ? "

" We'll have a mass for him on Friday, shall we . . . To-morrow I'm to go and see this lawyer man, apparently. I hope he'll let us have it at once."

" Oh, Tommy ! " Betty gasped a little at the tremendous thought. " How very wonderful ! We shall be rich—rolling. Oh, do let's come out and settle what to do with it. You don't want to go to bed, do you ? Let's come out on to the Embankment, and think."

On a seat on the Embankment, in the wan light of a waning Easter moon, they sat and thought.

" No more w-work, Tommy."

" A motor. T-two motors ; one each. We can have races."

"New hats. New shoes. Me a new umbrella. I shall d-drop my old one down a grating. Let's drop a whole lot of things down gratings, Tommy. The people below might be pleased to have them. Or into the river, and see them float down. We might have brought some out now . . . Tommy, shall we be really well-dressed in future? Or not? What do you think?"

"We must think it over later. Yes; I think perhaps we will. I like to be well dressed. I shall have a lot of waistcoats."

"Oh, Tommy!" Betty jumped up. "Luli, and Gina, and all of them! They must have some. Let's go home rather soon and see them, and make them take some. And some of the people here too. Particularly Vi and Norman, don't you think?"

"Of course. And that blacksmith who's got Umberto and Elena; he must have a lot."

At that Betty looked for the first time doubtful.

"I hope he will. We must put it very nicely to him, because he might be tiresome. We'll say it's to pay for the rabbits' keep. I do hope he'll take it; he was such a dear. But he looked at everything such a funny way round, didn't he."

"Oh, he only pretended to, because he was poor and didn't want us to know he minded. He'll take it all right, if we do it tactfully. I've been rather anxious about those rabbits really; they do eat such an awful lot. And not everybody likes rabbits. I hope he hasn't minded. We must make it up to him."

Betty's eyes were dancing hilariously. "Oh, Tommy, I've thought of something! We've got Cousin Arthur's house, I suppose. How frightfully funny! We'll live in it, and have real servants."

Tommy slapped the bench and chuckled. "I say, Betty, we'll ask people to stay. All kinds of people, all at once."

"The rabbit man, and Vi and Norman, and Luli and Gina and the rest—no, we won't, we'll have them at Santa Caterina, and only have English people to Cousin Arthur's. Hurrah! We can live at Santa Caterina as much as we like now."

"Except that the present tenants have got the house on a two years' lease. Never mind; we can travel all about the place meanwhile. One should see the world, Betty; it widens one's intellectual and psychological outlook." This was an echo from some voice of the past, and Betty's eyes grew more solemn.

"We can stay at Parker's Hotel, Tommy. And have the Lower Orders to lunch. I believe in keeping up one's Intimate Contact with the People, don't you? . . . But most of all I want to make the kettle man happier. Because he was so nice, and didn't seem to understand a bit about anything, did he, and his time was all full of stupid jobs that he had to pretend to like, and he didn't like fairs because they spoilt the next day's work. It would be nice to give him a holiday."

"Give them all a holiday," Tommy murmured, getting sleepily incoherent, and referring presumably

to toiling humanity at large. "Holiday for everyone—for always. Let's go to bed."

The wan moon was setting, because it was two o'clock. Before it set, Benjamin Bunter's son was born. His maternal grandfather sat in the parlour and groaned when he heard the news, because a man had been born into the world, to trouble as the sparks fly upward.

But the man's father was glad. He had wanted a son. A son could better than a daughter bear his share in the world's battle, as things were at present. A daughter would have wrung his heart for pity, with her mother bearing her own too heavy share upstairs.

When the whimpering creature was put into his arms, he studied its countenance earnestly and with hope. Babies, of course, are babies; that is to say, one baby is much the same as another, even to the earnest observer; though Benjamin did certainly comment, "He seems a fairly nice one as they go, doesn't he?" But though his baby was only fairly nice as an individual, it was a little emblem of futurity, carrying all the triumph of humanity in its tiny curled-up fists. What a career was bundled up in this woolly shawl! What an honest man's life of toil and hard living, and bread eaten in the sweat of the brow! Give them all work. Work for everyone—for always. So Benjamin reversed the Crevequer's millennium.

"Ah," sighed Mr. Robinson, who had been getting more and more maudlin as the night advanced. "Ah, he's uncommon like Louie, the poor scrap.

An' like me. Louie always favoured me. Eh, mother ? "

Mrs. Robinson was a pale, weak, faded woman, who in past days had taken in washing to keep her husband and family, but had now given that up, because Benjamin kept them instead. She was a pessimist always, and to-night, tired with her vigil, she said despondently, " There's no good fortune in his favouring you, the poor mite. I'm sure I 'ope that'll be more of a man than you ever was, if 'e ever lives to grow up, which it ain't likely, the lamb. Give 'im me, Ben. There, the petsie ; straight back to 'is pore mother 'e shall go, yes 'e shall."

When the petsie had departed, Mr. Robinson said, " Pore mother ; she's fair wore out, and doesn't mean 'alf she says. Women, Ben, is strange creatures. You never know when you'll get the rough side of their tongue, an' all for nothin', as it were. You find the same, I shouldn't wonder."

" I don't," said Benjamin, " know many women intimately."

" Ah well, Louie's a good girl ; I'll say that. An' she's rare set on you, Ben."

Benjie blushed, and jingled the things in his pockets.

" I don't see why we shouldn't go to bed now," he said. He helped his father-in-law to rise, and conducted him out of the house, and accompanied him down the road to his own abode. This was a nightly ceremony. Mr. Robinson spent most of the day-time at his son-in-law's cottage, but he couldn't sleep there, as there was no bed for him.

Benjie returned alone through the dark early morning. He was extraordinarily tired. He had been getting more and more tired latterly. It was a new experience to him. Perhaps it was having all the housework to do, now Louie was ill; perhaps it was the more continual presence of Mr. and Mrs. Robinson; perhaps it was anxiety; perhaps, as the Crevequers said, he wanted a holiday.

He was too tired to go to bed. He sat at the table and leant his head on his hands, and listened to the thin wailing above the ceiling. Poor Louie! All that pain and trouble and illness to produce one more life. Yet it must be worth it. That was the burden of Benjamin's thoughts to-night—how it was worth it; how one must allow no treacherous voice to whisper that it wasn't. Citizenship—the propagation of the best part of the race, the working part—the breaking down of the hideous fences between man and man—liberty through service—that was the heritage into which the crying infant had come. There still the ideals shone, star-like, the realities of an incoherent world. For the world was a little incoherent; Benjie, who hadn't admitted that a year ago, admitted it now. A year ago he had seen the world as a puzzle map that didn't puzzle him; it only wanted putting together; each part fitted all right into the scheme if properly placed. Now—was it the entering in of the personal factor that had made the difference?—it was a puzzle map that did a little puzzle him; and the putting together of the pieces was less simple. Perhaps it was merely being

tired; the united weight of the Robinson family was pressing upon him rather heavily.

He went to sleep in his chair, his head on his flung-out arms, till the morning sun woke him. Then he went and saw Louie, who was lying smiling at the baby. She smiled at Benjie too, triumphantly.

"There 'e is," she whispered. "You wanted 'im, didn't you?" ("I've done my duty, haven't I?" she might have put it.)

"Rather, I did," the boy answered her, peering with interest at the black head. "I say, let's call him John."

Louie was perhaps disappointed, but acquiesced. "Oh, all right. I'd thought as, unless we named 'im for dad, or for some o' your people, we'd have Stanley, or Albert, or Wilfred. But it's as you say."

"Don't like Wilfred," said Benjie. "I've got a beastly cousin called that. He wears his hair too long, and wriggles, and complains when the incense at his churches smells cheap. And Stanley and Albert simply aren't used, you know, for our sort of baby." (For the moment Benjie had forgotten, apparently, what sort of baby theirs was to be.) "We'll call him after your father, if you like, but I rather like each person in a family to have a separate name, myself. It's less confusing. Now John's short and simple, and easy to remember."

"John, then," said Louie. "But, bless the mite, I'd remember 'is name whatever it was. Ain't that a darlin', Ben?"

"I thought he seemed awfully nice," said Benjie.

" Though its very early to tell, of course. But he's sure to be nice, because we shall bring him up nicely. It nearly all depends on that really, you know. We'll teach him the right way of looking at things ; make him a gritty, self-respecting little beggar. I hope he's got a head. It'll be awfully interesting to watch him developing, and to see what we can make of him."

Louie smiled indulgently at both of them. She had performed her function, played her part in Benjie's scheme faithfully. Already the bundle in her arms had brought a renewed coherence into the puzzle map.

But a week later Mr. Robinson gave John a drink of beer and a bit of red herring, knowing that babies like a little bit of whatever we get, and coherence broke up into chaos. For they could never watch John developing after all, and the scheme was broken and marred.

Benjamin, tender in his own unhappiness, would have comforted Louie with his awkward boy's arms, but she would not look at him. She lay very still and quiet, and travelled down into the deeps alone. Her first remark when he came to her was curious.

" We've spoilt it all for you," she said, tonelessly, and he didn't know what she meant, or how she vaguely saw the Robinson family and herself in chief as pawns in his game. She, one of the pawns, had captured a queen for him ; her father had thrown the queen away, and spoilt the game. Incidentally, she had lost her little baby—but that was her own private pain, and irrelevant.

Irrelevant, as were all her personal concerns ; and so bitter that it cannot be more than referred to here. Life settled down as before in a few weeks, and Louie went about the house as of old, silent, industrious, patient, more apologetic than before, with miserable eyes. And every evening Mr. Robinson sat in the parlour and groaned, and said he could never forgive himself, not 'owever many more they 'ad.

John's birth and death had taken place in the Easter holidays. When the May term began, Cecil came over, a helpless, startled child in the face of issues beyond her, longing to comfort and finding no way. Their great object, she told Jerry, must be to give Louie fresh interests—anything to keep her from brooding. So she took over books, and offered them tentatively. Some of them she liked herself, such as Bernard Shaw's plays ; others she thought Louie might like, such as "Wisdom and Destiny," and Stevenson's essays.

" It's very kind of you, I'm sure," said Louie, gently apathetic. " But I'm not one to read much. And Ben reads to me of an evenin' usually, somethin' he's readin' himself. He likes to do that ; an' I'm glad he should."

Cecil asked, "What is he reading?" and Louie thought " that was somethin' about some revolution in France, just now ; but there, it didn't seem to matter what it was, it cheered Ben up to read anythin' " In fact, now that John's educational development had been frustrated, Louie was the more passionately offering herself on the sacrificial

altar in his stead. Ben should have someone to educate, if it was only her. Ben liked to think that he and she were interested in the same things, learning together; that was the ideal of equal married life, and Ben devoted himself whole-heartedly to realising his ideals.

"Why Maeterlinck?" he enquired of Cecil, finding "Wisdom and Destiny" on the table. Cecil couldn't quite explain why. She had a feeling that Maeterlinck might just "do for" Louie, in her present stage. When one is feeling weak and wistful and distressed, Maeterlinck sometimes steps in as a comforter. Only sometimes; at other times he is the last straw. But Cecil remembered that when her puppy had died three years ago, and a year later when she had discovered that one couldn't believe the Creed, Maeterlinck had been a help. She was tired of him now; but then Louie couldn't be tired of him, and he might open a new world to her, and take her through the magic door into the World of Ideas, where babies don't die of red herring, or, if they do, the Sage doesn't really mind, because it all turns to his good. Was Louie a Sage? Well, anyone can learn to be, Cecil supposed. And the Sage is the better for his suffering; he emerges enlarged and purified, which must be an immense comfort for him.

Jerry, being a boy, came over as usual, and talked as usual to Benjie, and never referred to John; He had been very sorry about John; but babies, of course, will come and go; it is their nature; and

Jerry never thought of their being much missed, till Cecil told him that Louie and Benjie were dreadfully unhappy. Then Jerry wondered if it would interest Louie to go in for competitions in the Westminster Gazette.

"Don't suppose she can write anything," said Cecil dubiously.

"Anybody can try," said Jerry, truly.

"But she wouldn't get a prize ever, Jerry, and that's so disappointing."

Jerry said, "How do you know? She may be much better than you think. She may be a poet without knowing it."

Cecil was rather interested in that idea. The poor are often poets without knowing it, of course. So they took over the Saturday Westminster to Wattles on Sunday, and showed Louie the Problems page, and how there was a prize offered for a new and original English poem called "Sitting on a Gate."

"Me! I dunno a thing about it," said Louie, turning the heel of a stocking. "I wouldn't know how to make a start."

"Oh, Louie, it's awfully easy. You just start with the first thing you think of, then the rest follows on. Think how interesting a subject it is—a gate, you know, and you might get down on either side—and there you are sitting on it, both the sides sort of belonging to you."

"I dunno," said Louie, rethreading her needle, "as I ever felt particular like that, on gates. And anyhow, I don't think in po'try. Never did. 'Arry

does, sometimes. But what he writes isn't about gates ; that's more about money, an' the pore man, and such."

"I wish he'd show me some," said Cecil, who was a good deal interested in 'Arry.

" It's absurd," she said afterwards to Jerry, " to expect Louie to write anything yet, of course. She hasn't properly learnt to take in yet, and no one can give out till they've learnt that. I'm not going to write any more verse or anything for a long time myself, for the same reason."

Jerry, who didn't think Cecil's verse very good, thought that was just as well. His own he liked much better ; Cecil always seemed to him to have ideas she wanted to express, and to be putting them into verse form ; whereas he achieved melody, and let it open out into ideas. And Jerry liked his own way best.

But it seemed that Louie, though the poor are often poets without knowing it, was minded to no expression of her probable gift. Instead, she did the housework (together with Benjie, who rather liked washing up and scrubbing) and gardened, and brooded, and often sat quite still in the little garden with stout Umberto in her arms.

When the Crevequers came, in their new motor car, that was what they found her doing. It was on a merry May day that they came, about sunset. They got out of the car, and stood at the forge door with the golden west at their backs and friendly laughter in their eyes, and wonderful new clothes

upon them. Tommy's waistcoat was very fancy indeed, and Betty's motoring coat a lovely vivid blue. They had always loved bright things, and now they had got them.

They said to Benjie, "Oh, how are you, and how are Umberto and Elena? We meant to write to you, but we n-never did. And now we've come instead. Did you hear that we are f-frightfully rich? Look at our motor car. And we have a house in Suffolk, all our own, and we want you to come and stay with us. Wouldn't it be rather fun? And will you come a drive, now? But first, may we go and see Umberto and Elena? We can take them away now, if you would like us to; we have a large garden now for them. Only we don't want to if you would like to keep them."

Benjamin was smiling at them, and frowning a little over dazzled eyes. The gold of the west was so bright, and so were the Crevequers' new clothes.

"Come and see," he said, and led the way up the lane, in his shirt-sleeves and leather apron.

"Elena," he explained, "isn't here. She lives at a neighbouring house—the doctor's. But I have Umberto, and he is well and cheerful. My wife, you see, has him on her lap."

The Crevequers hadn't known that Benjamin had a wife, but accepted the fact without surprise, like everything else. She certainly must be a nice person, because she had Umberto on her lap. Besides, wasn't nearly everybody nice, in this best of all possible worlds? They smiled at her in their friendly way.

"Has he been good?" Betty asked. "And would you like to go on keeping him?"

"They sent us Umberto, Louie," Benjamin explained.

Louis rose, bewildered. Benjie had told her that Umberto came from vagrants, pedlars in a van. These resplendent little people were more like Ben's own people, only more resplendent and more—well, somehow much more transparently pleased with themselves and everyone and everything else. The world, under their smiles, seemed to turn somersaults and stand on its head, and become a huge, insane joke.

Louie held out Umberto towards them, slowly. But Betty, seeing her eyes, grew suddenly grave and a little troubled.

"Oh, no, please keep him. You will, won't you? D-do!"

Louie drew back Umberto, and held him against her breast.

Betty said, "We're so glad you've got him. He looks so happy, doesn't he, Tommy?" The trouble was still in her eyes—something of pathos, pity, wistful appeal. Out of the radiance of their own joy of living, it was as if they were crying to Louie the desolate, "Oh, be happy, do be happy. Can't we think of anything to make it better for you?"

What they did think of was "Come a drive with us—just a little one! Wouldn't it be rather fun? We've got a motor car, a quite new one. We have so many new things; everything we want we

get. We've just been to a dog show and bought puppies. They're in the car—such darlings. Having money is grand. We live in a real house. It has servants. They come when we ring the bells. They lay meals on the dining-room table, all day. But we don't eat all of them. No one could, you know. And we like often to have food somewhere else, in the stables or somewhere. If you come and stay with us you shall choose where to have the meals. Do come. We have such a nice garden. It's full of animals, and places for games—croquet and bowls and tennis, and real things like that. We're learning to play them, though we aren't good. Do you like that sort of game ? If not, there's a giant stride and a see-saw and a stream to sail boats down. And you can get on the roof. Or just sit about and do nothing."

" Thank you," said Benjie, when he could. " It's kind of you. But we're rather tied here, I'm afraid."

On principle, he didn't stay in the houses of the rich.

It came back to the Crevequers that this queer young man put work before play. They sighed over it.

" It is such a pity. Can't *you* come ? " they asked Louie, who most needed comfort. But Louie shook her head.

" It's kind of you," she echoed, apathetically.

Here was an *impasse.* It was the eternal problem of the rich, who stand full-handed, helpless, before the unreceiving poor. The fact that there are as well the vast crowd of the receiving (potentially

receiving) poor is as nothing when some one personal relation thus proves unavailing. The Bunters wouldn't come and play with the Crevequers; and yet the Bunters so manifestly needed to play with someone, since, it seemed, they were so far failing to play with life by themselves. Benjie's chin and brows were more stubborn and unyielding than they had been last summer; oddly, poignantly at variance with them was a new touch of painful bewilderment that had crept into his direct blue look. He looked like a brave child who will go under without a cry—if the insupportable weight of his own beliefs should sink him. And Louie clasped a rabbit, with her arms still empty and her eyes tired.

The sight of them made Betty Crevequer want to cry.

Tommy begged them again to come out in the motor. And this they consented to do. Benjie disapproved of motors; but to refuse would have been like saying to affectionate children, "I won't play with you."

They ran along the Ely road, while the sun sank out of sight in a golden sky behind little willows, and every pool of water lay burnished in the fields, and cuckoos shouted hilariously, and Tommy drove absurdly, and Louie's colour brightened in the wind, and Benjie, who was good at machinery, set the car going again when it failed, and became so much interested in it that he forgot it was a juggernaut of the shameless rich, and only thought of it as a mechanical toy.

Before they came back they had supper at an inn. It seemed to be still a fresh and exciting experience to the Crevequers to be able to order meals without regard to finance. Their method of procedure was to ask each of their guests what their favourite dish was. Benjie said bread and cheese ; Louie said she like a bit o' bacon ; and tea, of course ; Betty wanted mushrooms, only it wasn't the season, or trifle, only there wasn't any, so had to fall back on bananas and sardines. Tommy wanted rabbit and onions. So they ordered enough of each of these things for all, that no one should covet other people's choice—except the drinks, which were more specialised, the Crevequers, in default of wine, drinking black coffee, and Benjamin beer.

After the meal they ran back to Wattles in the twilight, and the Bunters returned home.

The Crevequers' last words were, " If ever you feel you will come and stay with us, do come. Don't let us know or anything ; just come. Merrilies End, Frayley, in Suffolk. Down by the sea."

They burred into the dusk, their red lights flaring along the dim road. A year ago they had come in old clothes and broken shoes, in a pedlar's cart, behind two little mokes, one of which was dropping a shoe. Then they had left behind them an old kettle with a hole in it, and some drawings, and the echo of laughter, and Benjamin had put them in Class III, those who didn't work though they needed the money. A second time they had come, in a new motor and new clothes, shining with the pride of

life, the lust of the eyes, the pomp of the world, wastrels and vagabonds still, and now in no class at all—those who didn't work and didn't need to. And this time they had left behind them an invitation, Umberto, and again the sound of laughter, the unquenchable implication of a limitless joke.

Louie said that evening, breaking a long silence, "Wouldn't you like to 'ave gone to yonder place, Ben?"

He looked at her. "To stay with them?" for he, too, had them in his thoughts. "No, I don't want to stay with anybody. Do you?"

He asked expecting one answer and got the other.

"Sometimes I feel that 'ud be nice, to get away a bit, Ben."

He understood then. It had been stupid of him not to realise it before, the emptiness of the cottage.

"I see. Of course. Well, I believe you're right. It would be better to go away for a time. We will. We'll go and stay in London, with my people, shall we? My mother has often asked me to bring you; but I wasn't sure you'd care. It would please her, of course, tremendously. And I would like you to get to know each other a little. And directly we're bored we can come away."

"I reckon," said Louie, timidly, "as we ought to go there—not to yon place in Suffolk?"

"Why, yes. I think we perhaps ought, do you know. Besides——"

Benjamin stopped. He didn't think he wanted to go to Merrilies End. At least, he was sure he

oughtn't to want to. One may step with impunity into some atmospheres, however different from that which one approves oneself, but not into all. Some are disturbing. Benjamin thought that Merrilies End might be disturbing. Besides, he thought its owners wholly wrong in their principles of life ; and one doesn't, if one is a person of honour, go and stay with those one thinks wholly wrong, unless they are near relatives.

" I will write to my mother to-night," said Benjie.

Mr. Robinson woke up in his chair and sighed, and said, " I can never forgive myself, nor never shall. The poor little creater ! To think of 'im ! "

" There, there, dad," said Louie, mechanically.

Benjamin began to write.

CHAPTER V

THE LARGE GRASP

"YES," Lady Lettice Bunter told her friends, "quite an experiment, you know. So interesting to see how it turns out. Oh, *quite* of the people, yes. Benjie is like that, dear boy; the life of the poor, and all of us to marry the working classes. So he goes and finds a mill-hand, and does it. So like Benjie; he always would go and do things, directly he thought of them. And this was quite a matter of principle; there was no arguing with him; no, it was the right thing to do, and must be done. So he did it. Quite a mercenary match, of course, as Hugh said; he married her simply for her poverty. And the poor little baby died of beer and herring; so terrible, wasn't it. A dreadful grief to poor dear Benjie, of course; he felt it quite horribly, I know, though he never says anything; and so, of course, did the poor girl. Well, no wonder! I'm sure we all did. And now they're coming to stay. I am so pleased about that; I thought Benjie never would; he's so silly about the homes of the rich. Hates carpets, you know, and everything comfortable, and the mere

sight of a servant about the place is a red rag. I must warn the maids . . . Well, I am sure it will be most interesting to have them. I am looking forward immensely to making friends with dear Louie. Quite a representative type, you know—a real working woman. I saw her last just after the poor little baby's death, and then she was in the depths, of course; one doesn't like to think of it. How the patient poor do suffer silently! One felt powerless; one could do nothing. . . . My niece, Cecil, knows her much better, and says she is a most interesting type. But then, of course, Cecil, like poor Benjie, is prejudiced in favour of the lower classes. They pick it up, you know, at Cambridge; I can't think why. Cecil says, if she marries anyone, which she won't, it will be an artisan, or a Labour member, or someone of that sort. But as a matter of fact it won't, because Cecil is rather particular about nice people; and a *man* of that class, you know! Oh, one shouldn't be narrow, of course, but so aggressive, aren't they, and not to be moulded like a woman. Dear Louie! That's what we've all got to do now—to mould her. Cecil says we mustn't destroy her type; she must be a working woman always; that's her rôle. Well, of course we couldn't destroy her type, if we wanted to; so enduring, isn't it. It always has been and always will be, as Mervyn says. He believes in the good old stock of the soil, you know, tremendously—our labouring people . . . But by throwing her among nice people, something can be done; the more obvious . . . traits . . . softened,

and the tone improved. Cecil says I shall ruin her ; but Cecil *is* such an extremist, dear child ! I admire the working classes as much as anyone does ;—where should we be without them ? —but there is a happy mean, and I have a weakness for h's, I must say . . . Let me see, Anne, *you* haven't got these upsetting ideas about class, have you ? "

" Oh, I've no ideas of any sort about class," said Anne Vickery. " I haven't room for them. My limited mind-space is too crowded with ideas about people. People are so thrilling in themselves, aren't they, that there simply isn't time to think of them as anything else—as types, or representatives of a class, or the Poor, or the Rich. I admire the minds which can look at people like that ; they must have such a large grasp, to be able to take in all that behind the person himself. But I can't do it. I see a person in a common and unscientific way *as* a person ; and he either amuses me or he doesn't, and that settles him. People are so frightfully alive, aren't they ; and they count so much in themselves."

" Quite," said Lady Lettice, vaguely. " You're always so interested in people, Anne, that I thought I might ask you to help me with Louie."

Anne said, " Oh, but I'm not. Not nearly always. I'm often quite horribly bored. And when I'm bored I'm horrid. Being interested in people sounds like liking dogs, or babies, or books or something—don't you know the kind of person who asks you that ? Are you fond of babies? Do you like books? They might as well ask, do you admire hats ? So indiscriminate,

isn't it. I'm interested in interesting people (and hats and books) and not in uninteresting ones, of course."

"That's so sensible," Lady Lettice said. "Just what I feel myself. I often think Benjie and Cecil don't realise that enough—that you find kind hearts and great minds and souls to be saved in all classes, even the very rich. Yes, of course. And in the meantime, the niceties of life do count, don't they? And I *should* like Louie to pick up a little of your culture, Anne. You will come to my little parties, won't you? I want to get a few of you nice, bright, clever young people together, to make an atmosphere. Cecil is coming soon, and she will be splendid at it. Of course you're laughing, Anne; you always do. But you will help me, won't you?"

Anne was, of course, laughing. She had a habit of it; a sort of silent twinkling underlay even her more serious conversation. Anne was an amused person of about twenty-seven; she had a pale, delicate, ironic face, that easily looked tired and very easily looked interested, and rather easily looked cynical' and wavy, light hair, and solemn blue eyes that observed and discerned and twinkled, and an attractive, satiric mouth. The impression she dominantly gave was that of a gay vividness laughter-touched, critical, and, even when most tired, intensely alive. She had, too, a certain detachment about her, as of one who looked on at the game even while she played it—played it cleverly and effectively, and enjoyed it extremely. Her touch on the world was

light, and yet of an unafraid directness, a gay courageousness, as of one who will readily take a hand in all that offers, because it is more fun to be in the game. She wrote rather attractive articles and short stories, and was joint editor of a new monthly magazine, which was possibly why she often looked tired. Hugh Bunter wanted to marry her ; but the desire was not at present reciprocated, Anne being at present too busy to consider matrimony.

" I think I shall come," said Anne, " and protect the young woman. It seems to me she will need it. Between Cecil, wanting her to remain one of the noble poor, and you wanting her to learn the niceties and assimilate an atmosphere—and Benjie, of course instructing her in the Minority Report—the poor dear. I expect she thinks she'd rather be just Louie Bunter. I would, if it was me. Think what a bore she'd be if ever she did pick any of it up ! I shall talk to Cecil for her good. She hasn't half Jerry's sense."

" Jerry isn't interested in people, of course," Lady Lettice said. " He writes so much poetry."

" I know. Such nice poetry, too. He's a reasonable, sane young man with a truthful imagination, and sees straight. Poets and artists do. Now Cecil and Benjie aren't poets and artists, but idealists,—theorists. So they can't see the trees for the wood. That's more deplorable—much more—than not seeing the wood for the trees. It's like finding your way about by a map, instead of just following the roads and seeing what happens."

Lady Lettice said, " Quite. But of course it's

best of all to be able to trust one's chauffeur, isn't it. Mackenzie is wonderful ; he never makes a mistake. So much more intelligent than Anderson was. I asked Benjie if he would like to motor up—but no, motors have no claim to exist. Though I'm sure ours works hard enough, and Benjie often says work is the claim ; but dear Benjie sometimes gets mixed. However, he and Louie are coming by the five-thirty to Liverpool Street. I don't know whether street taxis have a claim to exist, or if not, how they'll arrive."

" However they arrive," said Miss Vickery, " they will be here so soon that I had better go at once."

" Oh, my dear Anne, must you ? *I* don't want you to, you know. I would love you to meet Louie as soon as possible. Well, you'll look in soon, won't you? I want to have a quiet little dinner or two for dear Louie ; no formality—just a few friends. I do want her to enjoy herself with us."

" Oh," said Anne Vickery, dubiously.

" The fact is," went on Lady Lettice, " you mayn't believe it, Anne, but I feel horribly shy. I always do when I think perhaps I'm not going to get on with people—when I don't quite understand them, you know. The poor man at the gate, of course, one does understand ; one has always been used to them, in the country, and one's servants, and so on, so it would be very stupid if one didn't ; but that's different, isn't it? Really here I'm a little bit at a loss. How does one—how *should* one—treat a situation like this ? It makes me quite restless. I

was speaking to the Bishop of Aldwych about it when he dined here on Thursday. 'Love and Tact,' he said. So true, of course. . . . But . . . Oh, Anne what do *you* think ? "

" But," said Anne, " how can I think anything ? I don't know Louie."

So she left the situation on Lady Lettice's hands, and departed hastily, lest she should be involved in it. As she crossed the street she saw a four-wheeled cab drive up, with luggage on the top. Four-wheeled cabs, then, had a claim to exist.

Lady Lettice, exercising Love and Tact, said presently, " Tea is laid for you in the dining-room, dears, just this first day," because the poor like it like that, and the niceties could wait awhile. So they went into the dining-room, and found it laid on a table, and there was a robin roll, and butter in a dish, and golden syrup, and hot scones, and a cake.

" Dinner at eight, you know," Lady Lettice told them, because the poor, not being used to dinner, might, being unwarned, make too substantial a tea.

But it seemed that the poor were not hungry. Louie was pale and tired, and only ate a scone. Benjie had a slice of bread and treacle. No, he never took butter, thanks. (" Darling, no wonder you look so poorly," said his mother. Benjie said he didn't ; it was a time-honoured subject of dispute between them.)

" Father's still at the House," said Lady Lettice. " The House of Commons, you know," she added, for

Louie. "He's a member. The Opposition side, of course. Benjie thinks that criminal, I know."

"Not a bit," said Benjie. "One side is about as bad as another. Our whole Parliamentary system. . . ."

Lady Lettice said, "Don't be silly, darling. You'll annoy father if you talk like that. He believes in it all so much. The Empire, you know," she explained to Louie, "and Church, and State, and the Land—so important, aren't they. Father's making a speech to-night about gas-lamps. He promised them at home that he would."

"Well, that's all right," said Benjie. "There's some sense in that." One's father can't go so hopelessly astray about gas-lamps as about Church and State and the Land, which are so important, and should be left to the young, who know.

"You'll like to go up to your room, dear Louie," said Lady Lettice, with her funny, unusual timidity. Louie agreed, and was taken up. Then Lady Lettice put her arms about her son, and kissed him again.

"Benjie, darling, indeed I will try to make her happy, poor child. But you must help me to understand. Cecil will be here in a day or two, and she will help too."

Benjie frowned a little. "You won't need help, mother. Louie is very ready to be made happy. It isn't difficult."

"Love and Tact," said Lady Lettice, "must be our bridge. That's what the Bishop said the other day; so fine, I thought."

"But why a bridge?" said Benjie.

"Oh darling, for the gulf, of course! Dear Louie is a working woman, and *of course* she can't help looking down a tiny bit, quite nicely and unconsciously, on what she thinks the idle classes. They *are* so deluded, poor dears, about that. Not their fault, of course, because they so seldom get near enough to see how it really is; and that's what I want to show Louie. Father going off to the House every day, and working away in the library with young Banister at all hours—really he's been looking quite poorly with it lately. He means to have some good chats with Louie—explain to her the working of it all, he says. Of course it's all so interesting, and I so seldom get time to listen,"

"Poor mother! You, too, being a member of the overworked class." Benjie was fond of his mother. He also sympathised with her lack of opportunity of listening to his father's discourses on the mechanism of state. He loved his father as a man, but found it hard to suffer him as a member.

"Louie, you know, is a Radical," he added, with a touch of pride in her. To which his mother returned, "Oh, dear boy, what does it matter? Father'll like it all the better; he can convince her. We must turn dear Louie into a politician, Benjie . . . And what about clothes? I thought of that at tea. I want to have a few people to meet her. But with it all she must remain a working woman, of course; I know that's what you want. We must take her as that—a girl of the people. That's what I tell everyone, and they *are* so interested already."

Benjie frowned again. " I don't see that it's their business to be interested in Louie. No one but ourselves need take her as anything. I won't have Louie bothered by having to meet idiots, mother."

" Not idiots, my precious. Anne Vickery, and Claude Banister, and nice young people like that. And they won't bother her ; they'll take her quite simply for what she is ; and at the same time make an atmosphere. Oh, I have immense hopes for Louie. It's so much what we *want*, isn't it ?—the introduction among us of the grit of the working-people. I'm sure I've often heard you say just that, and it is so true. I think it may have an effect on Hughie, do you know. I want him to get an attaché-ship, and he only laughs. Perhaps Louie may make him feel how fine it is to work. Her hands, you know. I was thinking about them while she had tea. At first I was wondering what we could do about them—then I saw suddenly how much finer they are like that. They will make quite an impression, I'm sure."

Benjie spread out his own brown square fingers on his knee. " I don't see much difference between one hand and another. Oh yes, I see—yours are white, and narrow, and smooth. But I don't think most people are interested in other people's hands ; why should they be ? I can't say I ever noticed Louie's . . . Did you say you had asked Anne Vickery to come ? "

" Yes. Dear Anne. So capable, isn't she. I thought Louie would find her stimulating, and she is immensely interested in Louie."

" Anne waits for that, as a rule," said Benjie, " till

she's met the person." He knew Anne well, and thought her attractive but episodic. (The "but" is Benjie's.) Undoubtedly her interest in Louie would wait in abeyance till they had met; then, if it came into being, Anne would be delightful; and if it didn't, she would be very detached indeed. Anne wouldn't "take" Louie as a working woman, or as anything else but Louie Bunter. Her personal touch was as direct and unconfused as that of the Crevequers; only it rejected much more.

Then Hugh sauntered in, and said, "Hullo, old man, I haven't seen you for ages. Why didn't you come up in the car, though?" Hugh was pleasant and kind, and would be nice to Louie: one could depend on him for that.

Mr. Bunter didn't make Louie's acquaintance till dinner time. He had been working all the evening with his secretary in the library; writing his speech, perhaps, about gas-lamps. "Business of state," as he put it. He took his responsibilities solemnly, and jested over them to show how solemn they were. Not for a moment did he forget that he was a pillar of the Empire. From him Benjie would seem to have inherited his ailment of incorrigible earnestness; but his was a mild and sober earnestness, unlit, and rather solemn than ardent. He wasn't clever; young Banister had his hands full sometimes. For the rest, he was a well-bred, conscientious gentleman, and did his duty by his church, his state, and his constituents without flagging, as he did his duty in the country by his tenants and neighbours and pheasants.

During the soup he talked to Louie very kindly and lucidly about the system which would demand his presence in the House after dinner. "While you rest at home, we make the laws for you, you see. I expect it never occurred to you what a lot of work our governmental system involves to us unfortunate law-makers." (Louie had to be educated out of her probable ideas about the idle rich.) "The mere setting ourselves," said Mr. Bunter, "against the tide that threatens to swamp the—the landmarks . . . But here you and Benjie will be quarrelling with my politics."

Louie shook her head, deprecating any such intention. Benjie said, from the other end of the table, "No, why? If you mean that you're there to oppose the Liberal government, I'm with you. I always oppose it myself."

"You are so right, darling," said Lady Lettice, with fervour. "I knew you would, when you grew a little older and thought things out, though you used to call yourself a Radical when you were at Eton. But after this Budget, who *could* be a Liberal any more?"

"It's very bad, the Budget," Benjie admitted. "I've nothing to say for it. Very bad, and typically Liberal. Vague, chaotic, ridiculous, and doesn't know what it means."

"Robbery," said Mr. Bunter. "Sheer robbery. *That's* what it means. *We* know, if *it* doesn't. And our clever demagogue knows: not a doubt of that."

Bob Traherne, Lady Lettice's nephew, a curate in

a Borough slum, said to Benjie, "You're on the path of danger, Benjie. You're degenerating into a mere Red Flagger. I suppose you've chucked the Minority Report already, as not good enough. That way lies paralysis; *I* know. I've seen so many of 'em start that way and end flag-flappers. You take my advice and record your vote like a Christian, and make the best of a poor job till you can get anything better. Piecemeal reform—that's my motto. Tinkering; anything you like. Only start in and do something."

"Thank you," said Benjie. "I will join the Tinkers' Union on the spot."

"If you do," said his cousin, "you may save your soul alive yet."

"Dear boys," said Lady Lettice, "I don't know what you are talking about."

"I was merely telling Benjie that it was a pity to be so high-principled as to repudiate practical reform altogether. It's a little hard on the people who would benefit by the reforms. But Benjie always sacrifices people to principles. I suppose it's because he won't come to church; he'd learn better there. I wish you'd come and hear me preach, Benjie. I may not be polished or profound, but I tell the truth, and it would be good for you. As you won't, I have to deliver myself at the dinner table instead. I beg your pardon, Aunt Lettice."

Mr. Bunter was looking disapproving. He wished Bob wouldn't talk so much; that wasn't the temperate, cultured, judicious, lucid expounding of

affairs that he held to be good for Louie. Besides, Bob was a Radical, and, whether tinkerers or flag-flappers, Radicals are a baleful influence on the minds of the ignorant poor. And as for Benjie going to hear Bob preach—well, that perhaps was hardly the way to effect his much-to-be-wished-for conversion from secularism. For Bob was a curious mixture of modernism and high ritualism ; and Mr. Bunter was a very orthodox and moderate Anglican, and liked his religion temperate and correct, of the best cathedral type. Benjie and Louie had better go and hear the Bishop of Aldwych, who was preaching a course on the Athanasian Creed. Bob was in favour of democratic parsons, and that, of course, wouldn't do.

" Our friend Bob gets carried away by his enthusiasm," said Mr. Bunter to Louie. " He is what one may call a crank, if he will forgive me the phrase. We're all young once, aren't we. But that was a good phrase of yours, Bob, about being so high-principled as to repudiate all practical reform. I must put it in my store-house, eh, Banister ? "

" Benjie looks as if he was wanting to say that even high principles are better than none," said Hugh. " You're hopelessly wrong, old man, as usual. I go none. You travel lighter and don't need to arrive. What do *you* think, Louie ? . . . No, I don't mean that ; I mean, what do you think of London ? "

That was like Hugh ; he always exercised tact, if not love, and it was a shame to puzzle Louie.

Louie said that *was* a great place ; and there seemed to be a rare lot of people in the streets.

"Awful, isn't it. But let's get on quick, or someone will begin about the Unemployed. Not that they *are* unemployed, you know, the people in the streets, but . . . I say, will you come to the Zoo to-morrow?"

Louie looked to see if Benjie would like her to. She gathered that he would.

"Or the White City?" Hugh offered her an alternative, in his kind, casual way, and she smiled at him.

"My brother say that's something wonderful to see."

"It is. Good, then; the White City. You'll come, Benjie? Let's all come. You too, mother."

"No, darling. I felt so ill last time I went to that dreadful place—with Mollie and Joey last week—that I resolved never to set foot in it again. Hugh dear, what a place to take Louie to on her first day in London! She hasn't seen anything yet—St. Paul's, or the Abbey, or the National Gallery, or—or the Academy." Lady Lettice was looking a little perturbed. What about Louie's education?

"The White City's the best of the lot," said Hugh, tranquilly.

His father waved him aside as frivolous. "Nonsense, my boy. Louie shall see our Metropolis on her finest side to start with. I will take her myself over the Abbey, and to look at the Houses of Parliament. Not inside *them*, you understand, Louie; no, no, that mayn't be! Mysteries of state, you know! Shall I tell you what would happen to you if you were found inside the House during a debate? You'd be

taken up as a Suffragette ! What would you think of *that* ? They'd think you were one of those kicking ladies who chain themselves to railings and scratch Robert's face. Now, you don't want to have anything to do with *them*, I'll be bound ? "

Louie's silence was sometimes effective. It gently put irrelevancies aside, not as vulgar or silly, but as something with which she had no concern.

" You must let Mr. Bunter explain to you all about that sort of thing to-morrow afternoon," said Lady Lettice. " Why women shouldn't vote, you know, and why the Conservatives are right, and how important it all is. And all about party government, that Benjie doesn't like, though I can't imagine what you want instead, dear boy. But you can talk it all out with father to-morrow. And afterwards I should like to take you to the Academy, Louie dear. You're fond of pictures, I'm sure."

" I like some pictures," Louie admitted, wistfully. She hankered after the White City, that wonderful place to see.

Benjie remonstrated here. " Not the Academy, mother. Why the Academy ? For the pictures, or for what ? *Really*, you know——"

No, for the atmosphere, Anne Vickery could have told him. At the Academy one may not have much to look at, but one learns the polite way of looking. Also, it is interesting to see the taste of our working-people in art.

" Louie," said Hugh, " you'd rather come to the White City, wouldn't you ? "

"That *would* be nice," said Louie, timid and half ashamed, but decisive.

That settled it. Louie had common tastes; her education must proceed with hot-house expedition. To-morrow for the inside of the Abbey and the outside of the Houses of Parliament, with Mr. Bunter for guide, and then for the Academy and its polite atmosphere, where one may, while retaining all the individuality of the unspoilt poor, begin the acquisition of the niceties. And where one may also meet friends, who will be interested in one.

Hugh gave it up, resigned. He had done his best for his sister-in-law, and he was genuinely sorry to have failed. To him it was simple. Louie would enjoy the White City, and wouldn't enjoy the Houses of Parliament; what then remained to argue about?

Hugh wondered what Benjie thought about it. What Benjie probably mainly thought was that he wanted Louie to get on with his parents. For his part, he was going to spend to-morrow afternoon lecturing for his cousin Bob in the Borough about the Minimum Wage. Benjie did a good deal of lecturing; he was a popular man on socialist platforms, the blacksmith of Wattles. He would have rather liked Louie to come with him; he was glad of his mill-hand wife on these occasions; her presence seemed to link him closer to his audience, to give him a more intimate sense of their needs and views. It wasn't that she agreed with him particularly, or didn't agree with him; but there she was, a visible symbol of his unity with the wage-earners who trod the verge, and a stay

and consolation to him accordingly. However, to-morrow Louie was to learn instead the ways of governments when they try to govern, and of polite society when it looks at polite pictures.

Bob Traherne, who had been glancing rather often and attentively at Louie, said to himself, " She wants something awfully badly. Her child—Benjie—the White City—perhaps all three. She'll have to have something pretty soon, or she'll die of hunger. And meanwhile they're going to give her husks to go on with, and she'll choke. And Benjie can't save her from them, because he's set the tune himself. He married her as a working-class woman ; and so he can't resent it if they all take her as that. Why, he took her as that himself—for better, for worse . . . From all clever fools, good Lord deliver us ! "

Bob Traherne, being a religious young man, was clear-eyed and saw straight, as Anne Vickery said poets and artists did.

Louie met Anne Vickery the next day, at the Academy. Lady Lettice had prevailed on her to " come and help with dear Louie." Dear Louie's head was aching a little, after a political afternoon. " Yes, that was wonderful interesting," she told Lady Lettice, courteously, of the Houses of Parliament and of the Abbey that makes us We. (" So," Mr. Bunter had told her,, " our great imperialist poet has it ; sometimes a jingler, and not always a true poet, nor always in the finest taste, but there you have him at his best. As in the Recessional—lest we forget " . . . " Yes," said Louie, " that do sound

nice. I've heard it at concerts; they recite it.") And now here was the Royal Academy, and Louie again prepared to be interested. She looked round at the pictures, and some of them were rather nice. Quite a lot of pretty child portraits there were.

"Now I wonder what you will like," Lady Lettice said. "You must follow your own taste, Louie; that's so important, isn't it."

Louie supposed it was. What she liked was pictures of children, apparently. And game and fruit on tables; because "that do seem real, as if you could touch it;" and anything with a story in it that one could understand. A good many of the stories, of course, one couldn't understand, and Lady Lettice's attempts at explanation were not always enlightening. She frequently fell back on, "Oh, they're just old Greeks, my dear,"—and of course old Greeks might be doing anything or nothing. Inadequate garments were the distinctive mark of old Greeks; there seemed to be a great many of them in the Academy. ("That *was* a queer country," was Louie's deduction.) Louie was of course the mouthpiece of the uncultivated masses, so her comments were worth observation. Lady Lettice took note of them, but, having a disconnected mind, she was not good at taking note. She wished that her intelligent and cultured friend, Mrs. Venables, the novelist, had been there. Mrs. Venables was by way of being much interested in Louie, and was shortly going to make her acquaintance. She had said it would be "indeed a treat to come into contact with such a

specimen of uncultured humanity. We must all feel that our intellectual horizons want widening by just such a rough jostling against raw realities." But she had drawn the line at the Academy ; that orgie of the uninspired commonplace was too rough a jostling for sensitive perceptions. She had even begged Lady Lettice to take Louie to the Post-Impressionists instead. " Louie wouldn't *like* the Post-Impressionists a bit," Lady Lettice had pleaded. But Mrs. Venables had thought that she might ; there was in both (the masses and the Post-Impressionists) the same sort of naïve, unpretentious candour. Like would probably call to like . . . Lady Lettice had looked at her friend rather oddly ; she never argued, and she had a profound respect for Mrs. Venable's greater abilities, but it came into her mind that it was rather curious to remember that Ida Venables had been helping to manage girls' clubs in the East End for some years.

Lady Lettice herself was not artistic. She rather enjoyed the orgie of the uninspired commonplace, though of course the people one met there were really the point. She met a good many to-day, and introduced Louie to all of them. " My blacksmith son's wife," she would say, demanding interested attention for her ; and would add, if she thought Louie was out of hearing, " She was just a mill-hand, you know,—so original." Mill-hands are, of course, highly original and deeply interesting, so Louie was regarded with an attention that puzzled her. She had never had such weight given to her words before ; but of

course when surrounded by other mill-hands, all presumably of equal originality, the wisdom of each had been lost in the general feast of reason and flow of soul. Such unwonted notice made Louie a little uncomfortable ; she devoted herself with attention to the pictures in order to be forgotten.

There were some magnetic pictures, that had little crowds before them. One such was of two gentlemen in evening dress playing chess, and you could see their white ties and all as plain . . . and one of them with a rare scowl. . . . " Wilfred Arbuthnot," said Lady Lettice, and Louie wondered which of the gentlemen that was. " Playing chess, aren't they, and one of them cheating—or is it both ? Yes. Both, I expect. His people always cheat. *Most* striking and bold, isn't it. You like that, Louie ? "

Yes, that did seem nice. There was some interest in that ; it was so real ; the light on the gentlemen's shoes and all.

" His are always problem pictures, you know," Lady Lettice explained. " You have to guess something, or answer something, or find something—I'm sure I don't know what, and I never guess right. I shouldn't wonder if he's got a pawn up his sleeve, perhaps."

That was really a fascinating picture. The spectators obviously knew what was what. Louie made straight tracks for the next crowd-surrounded spot. That was a picture of another type.

" Quite *the* picture," Lady Lettice said of it. " It does give one to think, doesn't it. Yes, indeed.

It makes one too dreadfully ashamed of the way one lives. *So* good for us to be stirred up sometimes, and reminded that there are such things beneath our feet. The submerged tenth, you know, and all that, and I'm sure all of us who are Christians. . . ." She was addressing a Bishop at the moment. The Bishop, who disliked *the* picture, said, "Quite so. A little crude, that sort of religious appeal. Merely as a question of taste and reverence ——"

"So important, aren't they. Yes. But I want to see its effect on my daughter-in-law. She, you know, *belongs* there; she is *of* them all, the poor struggling creatures—under our feet; how can we bear it? as Ida Venables says, and I'm sure she's right; she never blinks things, though I sometimes think she exaggerates a wee bit, dear thing; and after all, *are* they our fault, these horrors? Louie dear, look at this. Do you see what it all means? The submerged poor, you know, reaching up out of—out of a sort of pit, isn't it?—and the people who don't care, going to the opera, I suppose, aren't they?—and religion, you see, judging them all—but never mind that bit, it isn't very nice, as the Bishop was saying. Now doesn't it strike you as wonderfully real, dear?'

Louie looked, and presently said she supposed "that was an accident, and the street had give way and let them through. That did seem dreadful!" She added that her mother would like it. "Mother's always one for accidents. There was a pore man only yesterday in Wattles lost both his arms tumbling from a telegraph post; mother, she write straight

off to me. . . . Yes, that do seem a wonderful horrid picture, when you look close."

Lady Lettice said, indeed it did. "But not an accident, Louie; life, you know. It's the dreadful, sad way in which the painter sees life itself. The poor and the rich, and all that. But, of course, he *does* exaggerate; you must, in a picture."

"Oh," said Louie, "the pore and the rich." She a little lost interest. One heard so much of the pore and the rich; of course they must be important and interesting—did not Benjie think so?—but accidents are more fun.

It was then that Anne Vickery joined them. Lady Lettice hailed her with some relief. She introduced Louie and Anne. "Louie Bunter, one of the poor. Anne Vickery, a cultured friend who is going to take you up." So Anne understood the introduction, and the irony of her mouth became a shade more pronounced. What Louie understood it was always difficult to say. She looked at Anne with her patient brown eyes, taking in her neat, pale fairness, and something there was about her of keen-edged incisiveness, to which Lady Lettice Bunter's vagueness made a queer foil. There was nothing vague about Anne. Her blue amused look rested for a moment on Louie—on Louie herself, not on the ex-mill-hand—and then left her for *the* picture.

Anne said, "I do like the Academy, and that's the nicest of the lot. I hoped I should find you enjoying it. Don't you love it, Mrs. Bunter? I can't think

how anyone can say they are bored by the Academy. Look at it ! "

" That do seem nice," said Louie, since Miss Vickery obviously thought so.

" Of course," said Lady Lettice, " you can make anything seem ridiculous, Anne, by laughing. But Louie and I are enjoying it all immensely. And for anyone who values reality, you know, that picture. . . . Louie, you see, *knows*. Louie has *been* there. Yes. Benjie is talking about it all now, to Bob's people. I hope he is cheering the poor things up ; not telling them how sad it all is. But Benjie isn't always very wise. Now, I always encourage people to think they are comfortable, if they can manage to ; what *is* the good of looking on the dark side? And it's so much a question of what one is born to. Don't you agree with me, Louie ? That the poor do get along fairly well after all, I mean, and don't feel things quite like—well, like that, you know ? "

The poor again. Louie couldn't tackle them—they seemed too many ; the heterogeneous crowd of her acquaintances swayed into her vision, unsteadily. Do the poor feel things ? Do the rich ? Do fair men like smoking ? A column of Tit-Bits enquiries rose before her eyes. She gave it up. Napoleon Bonaparte and Lady Lettice could think in continents and classes ; Louie hadn't a large enough mental grasp for that. She shook her head.

" I expect there'll be some as do and some as don't," she ventures.

" How true," said Lady Lettice, " and what I

always say. You find people of all sorts in all classes. Dear Louie, it is so interesting to have you to make things clearer. You must *belong* before you can speak with authority, isn't that so?"

"No," said Anne. "You must speak with authority before you belong, because you never will after."

Then they went to the tea room. Louie looked a good deal at Anne, who was attractive. She would have liked Anne to like her. But Anne didn't so far seem much interested; she was cool, friendly, and detached; she perhaps didn't think mill-hands so original as most people seemed to. Louie felt before that blue glance a queer new feeling of being unclothed; the garments of the interesting poor that had been swathed luxuriantly about her of late by these odd, interested rich people, seemed to fall away. Stripped of her class prerogatives she stood, plain Louie Bunter, to be judged in some direct, personal way. One forfeited a handicap so; but it was easier to breathe.

The question became suddenly of disproportionate, unaccountable importance—was Miss Vickery going to like her or not?

CHAPTER VI

THE CULT

THE cult of the poor, generally and individually, happened to be a fashionable cult in London just at this time. One asked Labour members to dinner; one found starving geniuses in garrets; one worked in slums. Rough diamonds had a high market value; one discovered them and displayed them eagerly to appreciative audiences. To have secured one actually in one's family circle was to have done an enviable and admirable thing. Lady Lettice, now that the first shock was over, was not displeased with her democratic son, who, after all, was not the eldest (that, of course, could not have been tolerated with any equanimity). The presence of Louie, the rough-handed worker, at her dinner-parties, gave them a flavour. One must have lions or lionesses. Literary lions are a drug in the market, and so often also that sort of half and half creature, not refined enough to be agreeable company, not vulgar enough to be an interesting study; and, anyhow, of making many books there is no end, and we nearly all have a hand in that trade in these days. The same with painters and

musicians, only they are often not even half and half, and that is a bore. If you must be low on the social stairway, you had better be at the very bottom—submerged, as they say. Louie was very beautifully submerged; she dressed and ate and drank in character, and put cheese into her mouth with her knife. Mrs. Venables, Lady Lettice's novelist friend, looked at her with immense interest. Mrs. Venables was connected with East End clubs; the submerged made a strong appeal to her. She was not a democrat—far from it, because of course one can help so much more effectively from above; but to help effectively one must enter into the very heart of the people, study and wholly apprehend their mental outlook. And here was one of them sitting opposite to her at dinner, mopping up the sauce from her plate with a bit of bread, because you can't get it all up with your fish-knife. A magnificently uncouth creature.

Under the interested regard of the grave lady opposite, Louie blushed a little at first, then settled down to it, supposing that it was only because she was "pore." The rich take an interest in the poor; you can't get round that. Louie dubiously supposed it was a nice thing to have an interest taken in you even if it was only because you were poor. The table was surrounded by people, all presumably taking an interest in the poor. No, not all; for Mr. Jerry was there, just down from Cambridge, and he wasn't much interested in people, rich or poor; and Mr. Hugh, the kind, beautiful young gentleman,

who wasn't interested in anything, but either bored or amused; and Miss Vickery, who gave so much interest to what she found interesting that she had none left for what she didn't, and it was all a question which side of the line you individually were. There was also the Reverend Traherne, who was immensely interested in all the persons he saw, because they were persons, and nothing else counts; and Miss Cecil, who was interested in democracy, and in Benjie's efforts for it, and in making Louie do her part in the plan and claim her place in the social sphere; and Benjie himself, who was interested in putting the world to rights; and young Mr. Banister, who thought Louie a queer fish and Benjie another; and Lady Lettice, amiably anxious that everyone should enjoy themselves, interested and interester together; and Mr. Bunter, who was pained by Louie's exercise with the bread. Mr. Bunter didn't like uncouthness; he was an anti-democrat. Mrs. Venables, on his left, looked at him compassionately; the excellent Mervyn was such a thorough-going, slow-moving Tory; his unreceptive mind was impenetrably closed to all the rough young movements of the day; he was an example worth study of the uninspired commonplace, rooted with solemn dignity into established systems.

"I think," Mrs. Venables was wont to say of him, "there will always be place in this rough, jostling hierarchy for a gentleman. The Mervyn Bunters of the world fill their niche; long may we keep them."

"Gentlemen, yes," Bob Traherne would have

replied to her; "but pompous gentlemen, solemn gentlemen, explanatory gentlemen—must one keep *them*? I see no niche that requires such filling as that." Bob Traherne, however, was a representative of the ardent, rough young movements, and an impatient young man at that, and not interested in hierarchies. Solemnity—dignity—pomposity—they lie like feather-beds in the way of advance; and advance is, after all, the object.

This was Louie's dinner-party; the guests had been asked that they might "discover" her. And Lady Lettice did not think that Louie was giving them a fair chance. She was remaining hid, listening silently while Mr. Bunter told her about a dreadful thing called Reciprocity, and how Canada was going to be annexed by the United States.

"That is the way we have with our Empire, you see," he was saying, not without bitterness. "Too much trouble; can't afford to keep the links in repair; break them; let them go. That's the Little Englander's cry. *We* want to keep up family connections. Emigration; that's the solution. Keep the children in close touch with the old Mother; send the best and sturdiest of our working people to the Colonies, to bind them closer to us. That's the only cure for this wretched anti-imperialism that's sapping our sinews. The fate of the Empire lies in the hands of our working men and women; they can save it or lose it," and so on; very nice for Louie to hear about, of course, but it wasn't Mr. Bunter that was to be discovered, and so long as he was

so fluent, Mrs. Venables couldn't "get at" Louie. "I must get at her, Lettice," Mrs. Venables had said beforehand; "I must get right into her. I am used to digging deep; and one does have to dig deep to find those who have never found themselves. What a world of patient, untaught, unreasoning pondering one sees behing the pathetic, hungry eyes of the poor! One almost fears to probe—it is too profound, too sacred; and besides, if one wakes the soul of a people, one is responsible for much. It may be less easy to quiet than to rouse. The slumbering forces of democracy—sometimes one must shudder at the contemplation. It is a wonderful, appalling, but inspiring thought—they on one side and we on the other, and 'echoing straits between us thrown.' One can but try to bridge the gulf by patient insight and love."

"So difficult, so important, isn't it," Lady Lettice had absently replied.

So Mrs. Venables asked Louie across the table whether she did not feel the country calling to her this lovely June weather? "I always think, for those who are earth-rooted, cities in June must be a prison. I am sorry to say I am *not* earth-rooted; I am a city-hardened deserter. But even I feel the summons on days like this. . . . Is this the first time you have left Cambridgeshire?"

What was the lady thinking of? Louie felt a little hurt. She wasn't sure she liked the word "earth-rooted," either; she vaguely suspected it of opprobrious meanings.

"Why I've bin away plenty," she returned. "I've bin to Yarmouth—and Hunstanton—and I've stayed a deal at Clacton-on-sea, where my aunt lives."

"But you love the country best, I am sure," the lady insisted.

Louie was less sure. "That's a bit quiet," she opined. "But Ben likes it."

Mrs. Venables grew more alarming every moment. What she said next was, "And what has most impressed you in London, so far? I should like to hear your impressions of place and people. Do you feel the spirit of it all has entered very deeply into you? Now I wonder if you were arrested by St. Paul's?"

"No, I never," said Louie, indignantly defensive. "I didn't do nothing there, nor touch nothing I oughtn't."

There was a ripple of laughter among Louie's neighbours. Mrs. Venables, after a moment of blankness, brightened into comprehension. Of course one must use the simplest of language to the poor; she had been stupidly forgetful. She smiled at Louie reassuringly.

"You misunderstand me! You must forgive an over-sophisticated manner of speech. What I meant was, did St. Paul's interest you?"

Louie didn't see how she could have meant that, and was annoyed at having been laughed at, but answered a little nervously that "That did seem a fine building."

"That, of course," assented the persistent lady. "But did it *appeal* to you? Did it *stir* you?"

Mr. Bunter intervened.

"There I can speak for Louie. I assure you that she felt the deepest admiration and interest. She and I spent a most profitable hour there; didn't we, Louie?"

"Wrong answer," Hugh murmured to Anne Vickery. "Mrs. Ven looks awfully disappointed; she had hoped better things of Louie, though not of father, of course. Poor old Benjie!"

For Benjie, abstractedly listening to Cecil, and hearing Mrs. Venables' deep, questioning tones from the other end of the table, was frowning a little and gnawing his lower lip, with his look of a sulky child.

"But why does he allow it?" whispered Anne, impatient and amused. "Why does he stand by and let it go on? It's so helpless of him, if he sees and minds."

Hugh gave a quick shrug. "He can't logically protest; it's all a carrying out of his own plans, after all. There doesn't come any point at which he can decently turn round and say 'This is absurd, and insulting to a human being'—because that's just what his own conduct has been, all along. And Benjie, though an ass, is unfortunately a logical ass."

"It's all extremely interesting," said Anne, "but I have known more appropriate moments.... Shall we talk about Simon Bussy a little now, if we've got to go and see him to-morrow?"

"Mrs. Ven" Cecil said to Louie as they went to

bed, " is the limit. Never mind her. She's a rotter, you know; can't write in the least; her books are like semolina pudding. She thinks they're Ibsen-esque, but really they're like Miss Yonge in a fit of religious doubt. She's got religious doubts on the brain; religious doubts and moral certainties and social problems. She told me once that life contains three categories—the things one knows, the things one can't know, and the things one's got to try and do—make our lives sublime, you know, and all that. And about every two years she brings out a novel about some awful ass who finds the three categories help him, and develops his soul and tries to develop the woman's soul; and once she wrote a Book of Thoughts, in beautiful, artistic binding, and it ought to have come out in red plush and been used for a stand for wax flowers. I won't have her bully-ragging you."

Miss Cecil did run on so; one couldn't understand, as a rule, what she was talking about, and certainly not at the end of an evening like this, when it seemed that everyone had done nothing but talk and talk and talk. Louie felt and looked tired and blank. Cecil had to suppress a twinge of impatience; she talked for her own edification, but she rather preferred to be followed. However, she said generously, " Come and see the Post-Impressionists with me to-morrow, and we'll have tea at Selfridge's, on the roof. Then we'll go down to Chelsea, if there's a grey mist, and get an Arthur Rackham view; it's ripping sometimes. We'll travel about on

'buses; that's the only way of seeing London; you get impressionist views of the tops of everybody. You shan't see any more silly old Academies now I've come. And we'll go to 'Major Barbara' on Wednesday afternoon; it's so awfully jolly. And one day you must come to the 'Blue Bird'; I love it. So does Jerry; we keep going. I think you get a little more out of it each time. I like it better than anything else of Maeterlinck's now—except a very few things out of 'Serres Chaudes.' You ought to know French, Louie; I think I'll teach you, shall I? There are such heaps of ripping things you could read if you knew it. Though of course you ought really to begin with Latin."

"Ben tried to learn me a bit o' that. But I didn't seem to get on with it nohow, so he leave off."

"Well, perhaps it's waste of time, with so much in English that you've not read yet. Life's so awfully short for all the books one wants to read; it's dreadful."

Louie said she expected one just had to make shift wi'out.

Cecil said, "Then there's the Tate. Mrs. Ven would love to take you there, because of the Wattses. But she shan't; I shall. You know, I'm not awfully fond of Watts; he's a bit like what Mrs. Ven would like to be if she painted, only she couldn't be, because she couldn't have any genius, not a spark, however hard she painted; but it's what she might aspire to, d'you see?"

No, of course Louie didn't see; well, how should

she, when she hadn't even seen Watts, Cecil thought quickly. When she *had* seen Watts, and the Post-Impressionists, and an Arthur Rackham view of Chelsea, and a little Bernard Shaw, and the Blue Bird, and a few more things, she would also see, no doubt, what Cecil meant by her comments on these things and others. Till then comments fell a little flat.

"We'll have a really thrilling time," said Cecil, and left Louie to go to bed, less because she looked tired than because one can't talk for ever without being appreciated.

"I'm sure," Louie said, as Cecil left her, "you're all much too kind to me."

Was that better, or less good, than not being kind enough?

The next few days were chaotic; Louie, ciceroned by everyone in turn, was introduced to what Mrs. Venables called the soul of the city. "Never you mind her, Louie," said Cecil, encouragingly, "and don't you believe a word she says; she's a *duffer*, and Aunt Lettice, who never pretends to be clever, knows more about things. It's *not* a soul, all this; it's colour, and shape, and sound, and that's much more important. Mrs. Ven has souls on the brain; she's as keen as mustard on digging up yours, to see what it's like. That's why she keeps asking you questions. Benjie, why don't you shut her up sometimes, when she gets on Louie?"

"D'you mind much, Louie?" asked Benjie. The three of them were waiting for "Lohengrin" to begin. Cecil had said, "Louie must hear some

Wagner." Louie shook her patient head. " I don't know as how I mind that lady, not more'n others."

Then Cecil and Benjie began to talk across her about Wagner. They both had plenty to say. These two had always plenty to say to each other about everything ; Louie was used to that. They were interested in each other's ideas, though they often didn't agree. Only yesterday Louie had overheard Cecil say to Miss Vickery, " Benjie's ideas are always rather thrilling, whether they're about village communities or marriage. And they always *come* to something—that's what I like. I'm awfully interested in them."

" That's so nice for the ideas," Miss Vickery had returned, in her cool, light tones. " It must be so thoroughly jolly to have interest taken in you because you're an idea of someone else's that has come to something. Such a gratifying position. Is that why you're interested in me, Hugh, because I'm an idea of someone's ? I wonder if I am. I've heard that in sermons—that we ought to love other people because they are the embodiments (inadequate, of course) of the intention with which they were made. So interesting, as Lady Lettice says when she is bored. But I'd rather be liked for me-myself, I think."

Louie hadn't quite known what they were talking about. But when she had come among them a moment later, they had looked momentarily a little embarrassed, and talked about something else.

Anyhow, that was plain and clear, that Miss Cecil was awfully interested in Ben's ideas, and Ben, in his

soberer way, in Miss Cecil's. And they talked across Louie for ten minutes, and sometimes appealed to her for agreement, which she usually gave. They must both be right, Ben and Miss Cecil, because they were both so clever. It was no good Miss Cecil trying to educate her, Louie ; she would never be able to talk like that, about music, or pictures, or people, or life. And when the opera began, she couldn't make head nor tail of it ; for one thing it was all in German. Of course, the swan was beautiful to see.

" Not a real one, is it?" said Louie. " Lor ! They do make them wonderful, to be sure. But in ' The Whip ' they have real horses ; that *is* a grand play. . . ."

Benjie said " Hush," and Louie saw that he had coloured a little, and half glanced backwards. The people in the row behind them were friends of his. Louie said no more till the end of the act. Cecil said to her then, " Isn't it glorious, Louie ? "

" It's pretty," agreed Louie. " But they don't seem to speak the words, nor yet to sing them to a tune. That's not like one o' them musical comedies, is it ? "

" Not a bit," Cecil agreed. " I say, you *are* understanding it aren't you ? Shal I go through the story again ? "

But Louie said she thought she was understanding it pretty well. Cecil and Benjie began to argue about something again ; the funny thing about their arguments was that they were never about anything that could possibly matter much in practical life.

So Louie supposed that they liked talking for the sake of talking; well, lots of people are like that, both in mills and out of them. Girls and their chaps —how they do talk away in lunch hour, walking outside the mill, eating bread and cheese!

There had been a chap that had talked to Louie herself before Ben came along; but he hadn't talked so much or so quickly as Ben and Miss Cecil, nor about the same things. Hadn't his talk—all the old mill talk—had more bearing, somehow, on life as it was lived? It had been, most of it, about people; not strange, remote people who had painted odd pictures and composed tuneless music; and not about people in the mass, poor people, rich people, sad people, dark people, fair people,—how queer to think of them in lots like that!—but about the people, girls and fellows, foremen and workers, whom they personally knew, and who was walking with who, and what they would do on Saturday, and how so-and-so's mother was taken bad, and there was a whist-drive on Monday. It was always very direct, very personal, very much to the point, very obvious in its bearing on daily life. There were things that mattered and things that didn't; among the things that didn't was certainly the meaning of a chord of music out of an opera. Or did such things matter—matter perhaps to Ben and Miss Cecil as much as it mattered in the mill whether you got your sheet of paper and your sheet of copper neatly one by one all through the pile? That didn't matter to Miss Cecil, because she didn't know about it; perhaps this

didn't matter to Louie for similar reasons. Louie sighed a little at the glimpse of worlds not realised that swung giddily before her tired eyes. Since some things were like that, to mill-hands a stumbling-block, to the poor foolishness, but to them that understand . . . were not all things, perhaps, treacherous, unsteady, uncertain? All things, perhaps, and all ideas, but—and swiftly one leaped with this back on to solid earth that did not fail—all things and ideas, possibly, but not all people. People were different; people mattered; people stood like rocks, unswerving, immobile, somehow eternal. That was what Miss Vickery, the clever young lady, had meant when she had said, "But I'd rather be liked for me-myself, I think." Liking mattered desperately much. Once again Louie had a queer little hunger that Miss Vickery should like her, like her for her-herself. Louie had a feeling that would somehow justify her, prove something that all the interest, kindness, and attention of these other people didn't prove, for to Miss Vickery she wasn't, she vaguely knew, an idea of someone's that had come to something; she had to do without that halo of interest.

Slowly, under the influence of the tuneless music that she didn't even like, Louie's understanding was becoming oddly illuminated; she was getting to see more clearly, sitting between Ben and Miss Cecil, who were so interested in the music and in her, and who talked together of one and—and thought together of the other.

Louie stole a look at her husband's profile—the

obstinate chin that stuck out, the very young, dark rough head, the intent, serious brows, knitted in concentration. Ben was a lad with a purpose, certainly ; everything Ben thought of and did seemed to subserve that purpose. And his purpose was to do something, the little he could, for social conditions. So he had set himself to live the life of the poor, to know them better, to see what it was like, the life they led. But he liked smith's work too—he did, he did, Louie cried to herself, pressing her hard hands together in her lap. He loved it, playing with the soft white iron, shoeing the horses that come along the London road. Ben was such a child, really ; such a little eager boy, behind all his big purposes. And he had surely done the other things he had done partly because he liked to ;—surely ; or had it indeed been all to subserve the Purpose, to fulfil the Idea? Wouldn't that have been too cruel a thing for Ben, who handled even animals so tenderly, and was shocked when Louie killed mice with the poker, to have done ? For Ben was such a kind lad. Only of course the gentry were different ; they acted on principle, and one couldn't tell where that mightn't lead. They were wrapped up in ideas like blankets, so that one fumbled for their real selves through and couldn't touch them.

Louie didn't know she was crying. Cecil did, and thought it was Wagner, and was encouraged. Louie was coming on.

At the end of the next act she tried to make Louie talk about it, but failed.

It seemed a long time to the end. When they were out in the street again, Anne Vickery passed them going home from her office. She nodded and smiled, and it was apparent that she might have joined them and didn't. She very likely had something else to do. But Louie said apathetically, "That's me. She'd have come wi'out I was with you."

Benjie and Cecil neither of them heard her, because Cecil was saying something of her own.

So that proved it. The one person who had weighed Louie ungarmented found her wanting, felt bored, stayed away. That proved a whole number of things.

"Wi'out I was pore," said Louie in her heart, "they's none of 'em care. Not one."

The skies beat down on baked streets with their insupportable glare.

CHAPTER VII

A GOOD TIME AT THE FAIR

THE Crevequers had been seeing off a party of friends from the station four miles from Merrilies End, and had the rest of the July day before them. They motored back, along a white dusty road between sunburnt fields, turning aside to visit St. Francis' Church in Marle, because it was Saturday, and they hadn't been to confession for some weeks. But really what was there to confess, on these glorious summer days when life smiled so opulently, and needs and temptations were so few ? One could scarcely be out of humour, even momentarily ; one need never be ungenerous, or deceitful, or tempted to remit one's own debts. Though of course the strait way of uninteresting veracity remained hard of attainment, and there wasn't invariably time for one's prayers, in a life so felicitously full. Anyhow, presumably the Crevequers succeeded in recalling some shortcomings to mind ; having disposed of these, they asked their confessor, who was a large, cheerful young man, and a friend of theirs, to come back to Merrilies End with them, and presently the three of them

dashed at a headlong speed out of the town of Marle, and swung along the level road with the faint keen breath of the hidden sea in their faces. Merrilies End stood in a green garden above the grey stone fishing-village that straggled along the beach. From a gate in a yew hedge a path ran down over turfy cliffs and dropped into the village street, which smelt of fish, and sea-weed, and tar, and below it sailing-boats lay on wet sands.

The Crevequers didn't take the road up to Merrilies End, but ran straight down into the village. They spent a great deal of their time in the village and on the sands, where they kept a boat.

When they got into the village they got out of the motor and asked Mr. Giles the chauffeur, of whom they were a little afraid, and to whom they were always desperately polite, to take it home. Mr. Giles said, would they be in to tea, or if not when, as Julia was apt to want to know, with a view to the laying of meals.

A futile desire on Julia's part. "B-but we don't know ourselves," the Crevequers explained, a little querulous. They were afraid of Julia also. Julia asked so many unanswerable questions. "Of course it all d-depends, you see. We might be *any* time. No, we shan't want tea; we will have buns and suckers on the beach. Tell Julia so, please. And she may do anything she likes, of course—go out anywhere, you know, and if we come in suddenly before anything is ready to eat, we'll t-take things from the larder."

They spoke with dignity ; they were desirous of figuring well before Father Estcourt in their capacity of householders and masters of their own servants.

" Very good, Miss." Mr. Giles, expressionless, respectful, a little dour, touched his cap and departed. The Crevequers heaved a sigh of relief.

" S-suckers," said Tommy, and they stopped at the sucker shop, which had pink and brown striped balls in glass jars, as well as rock cakes and tripe. The lady within was a friend of the Crevequers, so the purchasing of the suckers took time. They finally left the shop with three pennyworth, in variegated colours, and three rock buns in three paper bags, and went down the sands to where the *Marchesina* rocked at anchor on a rising tide. The Crevequers took off their shoes and stockings—they always did so on every possible occasion—and summoned Peter Hitchcock to help with the anchor, and were soon out on dancing waters, reeling round the little cove. The Crevequers' sailing, like their motor-driving, was a little irresponsible ; both had elements of excitement. But on this golden evening there was hardly enough breeze to give their talents much scope ; the *Marchesina's* course was more peaceful than usual, as she dipped and lurched from cove to cove, the low sunshine mellowing her brown sails.

" You're not fishing this evening ? " said Father Estcourt, at ease in the bows. He was a fair, solidly-built, massive person, with a slow soft voice and slowly twinkling eyes, and immense physical strength,

and ten years ago he had captained the Oxford Rugby team.

"No," Betty answered, her cheek bulged out with a sucker. "We're just doing nothing at all this evening, for a rest, because you're tired. Besides, we sometimes quarrel when we fish, and that's a pity on a Saturday evening. . . . Do you like aniseed balls, Father? If you do, you may have them all, because I don't. They're the brown striped ones. I'm going to put out this into the sea, and have a pink one. . . . Mrs. Hitchcock is much nicer than Giles or Julia, isn't she? Giles and Julia are rather . . ."

"Alarming," the priest lazily put in.

"Oh no, not alarming. We're not *afraid* of them, you know. But rather—rather conceited, don't you think?"

"They think," said Tommy, in his injured tone, "that they know more than we do about things. It's a lie. They don't. We merely disagree—and when Catholics and heretics disagree, who is likely to be right, I should like to know? We keep nearly saying that to them, but never quite, for fear they get angry. After all, they can't help being heretics, poor things; and its jolly lucky they are, or they'd have to motor with us to church. But they should keep remembering it and feeling humble."

"In a better world," the priest consoled them, "the tables will no doubt be turned. They will have every reason to feel humble then. That is what always comforts me about proud Protestants. These rock buns are better than one would expect."

"Rock b-buns," murmured Betty, meditating, and trailing her thin brown fingers in cool water. "And pink suckers. And the sea and the sands and the *Marchesina*. And the motor. And the puppies. And the house and the garden, and the yard, and the village, and l-lovely weather, and l-loads of money, and people to play with. And . . . and everything."

"*Deo gratias*," added Father Estcourt, his mouth full of bun.

"Yes," said Betty. "But it seems rather—rather waste, not to be able to pass it on more. Doesn't it, Father? To *all* the people who haven't got any of it. Some of them come and stay with us; but some of them won't. And they just go about looking empty, and they won't take—oh, not so much as a s-sucker."

"The poor are always with us," said Father Estcourt, who seemed in a professional mood, and was also sleepy. "I can't say I find, as a rule, that they are averse to taking suckers or their equivalent." Presently he opened one eye and added, "But what you really want to pass on, you know, is the power of enjoying the suckers. Some people might suck for an hour and still be unfilled. That is what Socialists—children of the devil—leave out of account. They put the body before the spirit—a heresy eternally damned. The Church has always said, pass round the wine of life, and leave the bottles to look after themselves."

He shut his eyes again, and Betty said over his head to Tommy, who was busy with the sail, "But

of course that's not true, is it, Tommy? He seems to be forgetting all about the c-corporal works of mercy. It's a pity he's so sleepy this evening."

"He's always sleepy," said Tommy. "And I daresay he's hungry, too. Perhaps it would be kind to take him home now, and let him eat something. He'll wake up then, and perhaps sing us a song to my banjo. Then I'll take him back in the car; he likes the car."

As they voyaged back with the after-glow in their eyes, all the smooth evening sea was a pink glory. Betty sang to herself softly, one cheek bulged out—

"Difendi o Caterina,
Da peste, fame e guerra,
Il popol di Varazze,
In mare e in terra . . ."

They slipped round a rocky promontory into their own bay, and there on the turfy cliffs above the tiny grey village stood the low-winged grey house, sprawling in green gardens, fronting the winds of the eastern seas.

Father Estcourt opened his eyes and looked at it.

"Peace—honour—dignity—emblem of stability and rest. You won't keep it, you know; it's not for you. Don't you feel it, vagabonds?"

"No," said Tommy, shrilly and promptly. "It's ours, and Giles and Julia are jolly well not going to have it. They think Cousin Arthur left it to them, but he didn't. You come in and hear us beard them. We walk in and shout 'Julia.'"

"The ringing of bells is not unknown," murmured the priest.

"We walk in and ring," Tommy amended hastily. "Julia comes—quite at once; she obeys us in a moment. We say, 'Dinner, Julia, by the yew hedge.' Julia says 'Yes, sir. I think it is about to rain, sir. The glass is gone down, sir.' (They tap it, you know; cheek; they've no business to go sending our glass down.) We repeat, 'D-dinner at once, Julia, *by the yew hedge.*' Julia goes and lays it. She has to. She does, I tell you. Rain, indeed! As if we didn't dislike rain more than Julia does. As if it *could* rain an evening like this, whatever they make the beastly glass do. So we dine, by the yew hedge. And every evening Julia has the bother of putting away again the clothes she hoped she was going to make us wear. She puts them on our beds. White shirts. Black coats. Black ties. As if the evening wasn't the best time in the day to do things in. So she has to put them away again. Lots of trouble for her, isn't it? but she never tires . . . Oh, we've worn them sometimes, just to spite her. She doesn't like to find them next morning all wet and sandy."

"She like us to be respectable when people come to dinner," Betty added. "The respectable people who live round, you know—Cousin Arthur's friends. But I'm sure they don't mind. They wear what they like, and we wear what we like. They're nice, most of them; they make us laugh. We play real games with them—golf, and tennis and croquet, you know; that's the sort of thing they like playing. We aren't much good, but we practise quite a lot;

it's fun. Only most of them won't play on Sundays ; that seems waste of a day for them, as they like playing so much. They live too far from the centre of civilisation, Algy Fenchurch says—besides not being Catholics, of course. If you're a heretic living in the country, you feel you mustn't do anything nice or useful on Sunday. Like Jews on Saturdays ; how funny, isn't it. Julia and Giles are like that, too. They go to chapel, and that seems to make people worse still about Sundays . . . Tommy, we didn't put our shoes and stockings high enough up ; they've been d-drowned."

" My brown boots," Tommy mourned. " And my pink socks. And that's the second lot this week. Betty, Julia'll be awfully angry. What shall we say ? " They landed and dragged the *Marchesina* up on to dry sands. Peter Hitchcock told them that " The shoes and stockin's were to sea." Tommy hinted that he might have effected a timely rescue ; one could imagine Peter placidly watching the catastrophe, pipe in mouth.

" Shall we have a rescue expedition ? "the Crevequers wondered. " Diving from the boat ? "

That might have been fun ; but they remembered that Father Estcourt was hungry, and deferred the project till next morning. So they went barefoot up the cliff path that ended at a little green door in a grey garden wall.

The garden, rambling and sweet and yew-shadowed, was mellow in evening light and happy with animals. Disreputable curs gambolled and grinned and

snuffled in shrubberies; a three-legged, blue-eyed kitten waved his tail from a red aloe pot on a stone pedestal; a lean billy goat pawed the croquet lawn; the tank round the fountain was afloat with a brood of golden ducklings; everywhere were guinea-pigs.

A cynical-lipped gardener stepped forward and said, "They bunnies have gone 'ome."

Tommy said, "What on earth do you mean? You've let them escape." His voice shrilled with passion; probably the gardener was another conceited Protestant. He shook his head smiling, grimly. "They're gone above, sir. Dogs. Bunnies got out; dogs hunted 'em; caught 'em; worried 'em dead. *They're* all gone."

"D-don't look like that," stammered Tommy. "D-don't, I tell you."

"Collect the bodies," said Betty, with a small sigh, "and we'll bury them. We'll have a proper funeral. Oh, poor darlings, I do hope they died happy. They never really *minded* being hunted, of course. And dogs will be dogs; but we must beat them, Tommy, all the same. I wonder if they each got one. *This* is what comes of making the lion eat straw with the lamb, and the ox lie down with the cockatrice. It never really works."

Then Louie Bunter came towards them, and she was as they had seen her first, clasping a rabbit in her arms with hungry eyes.

"I could only save one," she said, and gave it to Betty. Then her eyes met Father Estcourt's, and grew dark and wide, as with a memory.

But Betty said, "Hurrah. Have you both come?" and Louie shook her head. "Only me. I thought you wouldn't mind, being as how you said we could. I come from London. We was with his father and mother . . . And they were that kind to me, talkin' to me and showin' me things . . . And . . . I come away this afternoon."

"Hurrah," said Betty again. "Let's all have dinner. A proper dinner, because we're all hungry. Go and tell Julia, Tommy, and I'll take Mrs. Bunter up to her room. What fun that you've come."

Louie went in with her very simply. It was all quite natural and unembarrassing at Merrilies End; people didn't notice one another in the same way as they did in London, but seemed to take each other for granted, and treated one person very much like another. That was restful.

They had dinner in the garden, and the Crevequers babbled in their infantine way of childish things, and Father Estcourt woke up from his inertness and told stories, and Louie wasn't asked how anything struck her, or expected to give her views on the rich or the poor or anything else. It was like old days at Wattles, before she had become an idea of someone's and interesting. Louie had a peaceful feeling, beneath the dull ache of her soul, that she had found at last something she had long sought for in vain. And, if these were the right relations, how unutterably wrong were the others. . . .

It was part of the simplicity of the atmosphere that Louie, coming abruptly, as they sat in the dusk

after dinner, on this so utter wrongness, could without shame do the natural thing. It was a wrongness that demanded tears, and tears she gave it, breaking suddenly into them, surprised out of her numb composure, struck through and through by the completeness of realisation at last.

Betty's hand touched her knee in the darkness, and Betty stammered very gently, "Oh, I'm sorry. Would you like to come to bed at once? We've been d-drivelling away, and all the time you must be so awfully tired."

"It's such a rotten journey," Tommy added, with concern.

Louie, having begun to cry, could not very easily stop. It was as if she must cry away here and now all that tragedy that so hurt her; cry it away, and then be sensible and firm and calm for ever. So in the soft shadows of the gathering night she wept, and Betty said again, "Oh, I'm s-sorry. Can't we help *at all*?"

"Seem as if when things is all wrong, there ain't nothin' for it but to back out and pretend as how they ain't happened," Louie concluded huskily at last. "Being as how there's no mendin'—none at all. An' it don't matter very particular, so long as you can back out. But that would hurt you, to go on . . . You'll excuse me talkin'. Seem as if that were right, to come here an' straighten things out a bit. An' now I've done it, an' I've got 'em straight, an' I won't bother you no more, bein' as how you'll

be tired of me disturbin' you, and if I might go to bed . . . ."

"Yes," said Betty. "Oh yes. Come in now—if you wouldn't like to come down to the sea a little, first. We'd love to take you, you know . . . but of course you're tired. Come in."

Louie stood up, unsteadily. Her face glimmered wet and pallid out of the shadows. Father Estcourt's sleepy, keen eyes watched her closely. He got up and stood looking down at her from his great height—a massive, inexpressive person. He said gently, "John is dead," less questioning than assuming, and asked no corroboration from her. He had known that John was dead directly he had seen her eyes as she had come to them with the rabbit in her arms.

"The Monday after you done him," said Louie apathetically.

He bent his head.

"I'm glad," she added, with a sort of triumph, "as how I had him done. I didn't ought to, on the quiet from Ben and all; but I'm glad. For if so be as there is anythin' to follow, John'll be sure to 'ave got it. Won't he, sir?"

"Quite sure," said Father Estcourt. "John is in God's hands."

Louie drew a long breath.

"An' he'll never be a great pore man, like Ben meant. Ben meant to bring 'im up to help make the world better . . . but he was just a mite of a baby, an' he died. . . . and Ben's notion came to nothin'.

Pore Ben ; I ain't done 'im a mite o' good, all along. Seem as if I must spoil 'is notions even then, goin' about to 'ave John done behind his back."

"John," said Father Estcourt, professionally, "being an individual soul to be saved, rather than a 'notion' of his father's, had every right to his own salvation. Even the youngest of us has that right—must possess his own soul and work out his own salvation, independently of the plans of others."

"An' there it is," said Louie, agreeing. "An' that's what they don't understand, up in London. . . . Good-night, sir."

Betty and she went in together.

Father Estcourt said to Tommy, "A curious instance, that. I was riding through a Cambridgeshire village in the spring, and stopped at a forge. I wanted some mending done at the same time, and the smith (who I gather is a friend of yours ?) sent me up to his cottage for needle and thread. I found a little lame girl downstairs ; she went up to fetch me what I wanted, and came down with the message that I was to come up and 'do' her sister's baby. I did, of course. After the ceremony I found that the parents were not even Protestants, but the father a firm secularist, and the mother acquiescent in his beliefs. The father was not to know anything about it ; in fact, the reason the mother had summoned a strange priest was because she couldn't very well have the local parson and keep the secret. Her own views on the subject seemed vague ; oh, it was very simple really ; she accepted her husband's

beliefs, like everything else of his, but she was a mother before a secularist, and wanted to switch 'John' on to any good that might be going for him, though probably, since Ben said so, it was all a mare's nest. Anyhow, I had to promise solemnly not to let Ben know. . . . And so John died next week. Poor girl! And now she seems pretty far through, doesn't she? What's the story, I wonder?"

Tommy shook his head. "I don't know, except that she's beastly miserable. I suppose she and he have differed. He's a good sort, you know, and awfully nice, though with funny ideas about things. Works like anything all the time, and thinks everyone should, and hates money. And *reasons*, you know, and does things on principle, and is awfully unhappy if they don't fit. Seem as how" (the Crevequers were very susceptible to the manner of speech of their friends) "he was playing a game of chess all the time. Don't you know? Then when something goes wrong they knock the board over, that sort. . . . I shouldn't wonder if they're best apart, him and her. Now I think I'd better take you back, hadn't I?"

Father Estcourt, getting up and relighting his pipe, said (naturally) "What people of that sort want is to be Catholics. It's so simple really. For it's all the sin of pride, and Holy Church murders pride and teaches the virtue of simple humility. She also teaches the folly of leaving the individual out of account, since her mission is to the souls of individuals. She says . . ." And so forth. Priests

Tommy knew, must be allowed their occasional hour on the stump; and of course it was all true beyond a doubt, though the Crevequers, had they been on the stump, would rather have said, "What people of that sort—people of any sort—want, is to have a good time at the fair, and throw rings round all the objects of their desire, and hit the cocoa-nuts they aim at." Given that you don't, that you spend your money and miss the cocoa-nuts and the alarum clocks, and even the salt-cellars, there remain for the empty-handed the music of the merry-go-round and the sight of the less empty-handed still shying and swinging, and—well, all the glorious resources that a fair has even for the penniless. Only plunge into it and see, and choose your company with discretion, and the fair will do the rest. In short, don't try to mould life, but let it mould you. So perhaps, after all, Father Estcourt, with his Holy Church that murders the sin of pride, and the Crevequers with their fair, were on the same tack and meant the same thing.

Benjamin Bunter, walking into Merrilies End on the following morning, meant quite another thing. His boots were white with July dust, and his eyes tired with travelling, and his face damp and pale with the heat, and his chin aggressively prominent. He found Louie sitting in the garden, watching her host and hostess quarrelling over croquet, a game they played with the ecstatic fervour of the novice. They had been to church early, and a little to their surprise Louie had accompanied them. Perhaps she

had learnt to expect that any of the Crevequers' pursuits would be enjoyable; though their form of worship was certainly "proper queer" to the uninitiated. Louie hadn't been to church for some time; her life hadn't left her much time for it, and the Robinson family had a traditional feud with the vicar, and then of course Ben had come, with his own theories of life; and church-going, she had learnt, was a relic of a darker age. But now Louie was in an experimental mood.

The Crevequers were delighted to see Benjie. He arrived opportunely, in the middle of a passionate scene of recrimination. They flung down their mallets and welcomed him.

"Hurrah! Now we shall be four for tennis. I wish you'd told us, and we could have met you. You didn't walk up all the way? How tired you must be. L-let's all come and bathe."

Benjie gave his rather nice, grave smile at them.

"It does seem rotten to break in on you like this, so suddenly. But I came to speak to my wife. I stayed at the inn in the village last night. I arrived at midnight, so I couldn't come up then."

"Oh you'd have found us somewhere about," said Betty. "Not Mrs. Bunter, though; she'd gone to bed. I wish you'd come up and slept here; what a shame."

Louie, whose eyes hung on Benjie's face, said, "How'd you know I were here?" Benjie coloured. He hadn't meant to give away Louie's secret flight. But after all the pedlar people didn't matter; they

thought nothing odd, any more than kittens would.

"I don't know. I suppose I guessed. I came on the chance, anyhow; then I found out for certain at the station that you'd arrived. I suppose I—thought it likely."

Now he came to think of it, it had been a little odd. He hadn't even speculated; he had just come.

"Well," said Tommy, "c-come and bathe, will you?"

Benjie said "All right."

Betty looked at Louie. "Shall we, too?" Louie hesitated a moment, then got up. "That would be nice," she said. She was coming on in the business of living; first church, then a bathe.

So they all four bathed in the golden July noon, in an intensely blue sea. Louie, who couldn't swim, sat waist-deep in ripples, and Betty splashed lazily about near her. Both the Crevequers were more used to the Italian fashion of bathing, which is to lie in the edge of the sea all day, with intervals for drying in the sun, than to the energetic British duck, swim out and return. Benjie, of course, ducked and swam out, with his usual deliberate vigour and determination of purpose, and Tommy swam with him till he was tired of the monotony, then he turned on his back and lay and looked at the sun and tried to catch fishes with his toes.

Out of the sun-webbed blue laver they came at last, warm and languid and sticky and salt. You are not the same after a bathe as before. You return to the dusty world either braced, or enervated,

or with a slightly shifted scale of values, or with some quite new vision. The water-vision may or may not work on the dry land; but it is, anyhow, interesting. You may come back and see men as trees walking—or trees as men.

After they had lunched, the Crevequers went off to some region of their own, from which cries of excitement, joy, and rage faintly penetrated to the ears of Benjie and Louie, who sat together in the garden, in the shade of the large copper-beech.

Benjie then drew out of his pocket a crumpled sheet of note-paper, and unfolded it with his puzzled frown.

"What did you mean, Louie?" he said. "You say, 'I am going away for a bit to think things straight.' What things did you mean, exactly?"

Louie said, "Oh Ben, everything. How it was as things was different from what I thought once—an' what to do—an' all. *You* know." Her voice pleaded with him to know, to be intelligent and understand.

"But," he said, "*are* they different? How? How, Louie? And what things?" He had got his first in his tripos quite easily, but still he wasn't very intelligent, even after his bathe.

"Well," admitted Louie, "perhaps not different. But I mean *I* come to see how it was. See here, Ben." She paused, casting about how to express these things that he, with all his superior wisdom and learning, should have known. It was difficult for an inarticulate person, who had never learnt to express complicated things, but Louie had a try.

"You see, Ben, I thought as how, when you wanted me to marry you, that was because you wanted me for myself. Because you *liked* me. But since, I come to see as how it was more likely because I was pore. I come to see that because all of them—all your folk, nearly—on'y liked me for that—because I was strange, as it were, and not one o' their sort, and they felt an interest. But they didn't all feel an interest. Miss Vickery, now; I thought to myself, Miss Vickery ain't interested in the pore as such; if Miss Vickery likes me, it'll be for me myself. So I waited to see. An' she didn't take to me. So that showed; no one couldn't take to me, none o' your sort o' people, for me myself. Bein' as how I'm stupid, and don't know nothin', and how should they? So I thought, it's the same with Ben. Ben never cared for me but that I was a pore working girl, and that's the sort he wanted for a wife, bein' as how he's interested in pore folk, and helpin' 'em on an' all, and takin' to smith's work, as he wern't born to, just to be one of 'em. That's how it were, I come to see; you took me along with the forge an' all the rest. And for a while I didn't mind particular. An' if John had lived it would have seem different, John bein' part of the plan, as it were. But 'e died—" her voice quivered momentarily, "an' you an' me was left alone. An' it seem as how we ought to—to *love* each other, Ben,"—she crimsoned suddenly—"an' as how nothin' else should rightly count. An' then it come to me, Ben's that young and clever, an' a gentleman born, an' he sees things different, an' he

can marry for a sort of game, but I can't, an' that's how it is."

Benjie's eyes at first were on her face, and a slow dismay grew in them as she talked. When she flushed, he too turned a dull red, and turned away, and leant his forehead on his hand. He stayed so after she had done, plucking at the daisies on the grass with one hand and shading his face with the other.

At last he looked up, and spoke with difficulty.

" You've said some rather dreadful things, Louie. And I've been trying to think quite honestly how far they are true. In so far as they are, I want you at least to believe that I never knew them myself till you showed me. I suppose you're—of course you are—much wiser and more understanding than I am. I don't want to think so. I would rather be able to tell you at once that you are fanciful and morbid, and quite off the rails about the whole business. But I suppose no good ever came out of not being entirely honest; anyhow, I can't be anything else with you. And to a certain extent I see that you're right. Of course I saw it all along as regards my people and their attitude, and it made me pretty sick; but I never applied it to myself. I never saw that they were only taking you as—as I suppose I had taken you myself at first, only more so. . . And now I don't know what I can say. It seems so futile to ask you to forgive me. I think instead I want to ask you to try to move your point of view a little. Granting that I did too much rule out—well, emotion —from my scheme of life—it wasn't, you know,

because I was wanting to offer you anything less than the best ; it wasn't by way of a second best ; it was honestly and simply because, to me, that *was* the best way. I offered you the highest thing I knew—the best idea I had."

" An' I didn't want no ideas at all," Louie cried, within herself, " I just wanted Ben."

" You see," Benjie went on, frowning his puzzled, boy's frown, " I still think that is the best idea there is. I still think one may rule out personal emotion and construct one's life on a basis of—of other things —of sense and reason, and the ideas one believes in. I believe myself that those things—the principles one lives by—are above everything else ; infinitely above personal tastes and preferences and so on. I hope I should never ask a person to share my life *merely* because I was fond of her, though of course that would always be one of the things one would take into consideration, if only because the thing couldn't possibly work without it. But there seem to me to be other and larger and much more important considerations. Well, that is my own personal opinion. Where I went wrong was in not ascertaining for certain that it was yours too. I thought I had ; I did really, Louie. But I was wrong ; I was an ass. And I'm most horribly sorry and ashamed about that. And I ask you to try to forgive me, if you can."

" Oh, forgive," said Louie. " It ain't like that."

" Well," said Benjie, troubled and abrupt; " I only see one thing to do in the matter. We must try again. Will you, Louie ? "

" It 'ud be just the same," said Louie, pinching her hard fingers together to keep from crying. " It wouldn't be any different, Ben. I can't think like you, an' you can't feel like me—so there's an end."

It certainly looked like an *impasse*. But Benjie, a determined young man, tilted at it again.

" Louie, I think we shall be able to make something of it, I really do, if we go at it again, in the right way. Oh, don't let's give up. I beg your pardon for all the mistakes I've made all along—I know I'm a blundering ass—and can't we forget them, and go on and try to be happy ? "

Twisting her handkerchief tightly in her two hands (for she knew she might at any moment break into tears and want it, though she was trying so hard) she stated the issue simply—the clear, poignant issue they had arrived at through so much complexity.

" But you don't love me, Ben. And I don't want to live with you without you do. There's all it is."

He said, stammering like a Crevequer, " B-but I do—I do, Louie. I do love you, very much."

Her wistful look scanned his square, honest boy's face, with the blue, deep-hung eyes that could not lie.

" When I say love, Ben, my dear, I mean something as I don't think you're rightly old enough to understand. I'm not meanin' just a kind feelin' like. You *don't* love me, an' you never have and never will, an' how should you ? An' I won't live with you without you do ; I was always one to be proud, 'Arry tell me ; an' I'm goin' home to father and mother an' the mill. They'll all say its proper queer, me doing that ; but

I'm not one to mind what folks say, and you ain't either, Ben. So we'll just settle it so. An' you shall go on workin' an' bein' a smith an' goin' among the pore, an' we'll be good friends an' no more. . . . Seem hard as how we can't undo it an' set each other free ; you're but a young chap to be tied up for life. . . ." She was thinking of all the clever young ladies, like Miss Cecil, beyond the stretch of Ben's tether. It was the thought of Miss Cecil, with her eager interest in Louie and her outpoured flood of ideas, that suddenly brought the tears.

" Oh, Ben—oh, Ben—that was a proper foolish thing we done ! "

Benjie was always like a troubled child in the face of tears. But he strove still after Reason, his life-long supporter.

" Don't cry, Louie—oh, don't. Of course we'll undo it as far as we can, if you like. That is, we'll live apart as long as you wish, and I won't bother you. Yes, you're quite right ; that's the only reasonable solution, if you feel like that about it. Only any time you change your mind and are willing to give it another try, I shall always be there, waiting, you know. . . . Oh, queer—no, of course we don't mind what people call us ; nothing counts but you and me, and what we decide is best to do. But don't let's be in a hurry ; let's think it over thoroughly and discuss it again later, shall we ? Well, there's an end for the moment, anyhow. . . ."

There was ; because the Crevequers were emerging from the back regions, piloting two visitors of

apparently alien extraction and certainly disreputable personal appearance.

"The inn wouldn't take them in," Tommy explained, "so they're coming to spend the night with us."

The guests, who had a distinctively Slavonic wealth both of hair and nails, smiled and bowed in a way Benjie thought obsequious. He sympathised with the inn. He was a broad-minded youth, and objected to the Aliens Act, but when one met them face to face . . . Benjie, in fact, was a typical product of his generation and his university—a personally fastidious democrat. But it is a courageous type, and Benjie put his personal tastes studiously behind him. Only he didn't believe that these aliens were Workers; at a glance he put them in Class III (those who didn't work though they needed the money). Well, the Crevequers themselves were, of course, no class at all. Benjie reverted to his attitude of judge. They didn't work, these idle, frivolous people, and they encouraged others to be idle and frivolous too. Why, in the name of reason, didn't they give these miserable Poles a job in the garden, and give them a wage for it, instead of extending to them this childish, fruitless hospitality? They were probably pauperising the countryside. Benjie, in sudden revolt against these cheerful representatives of the forces of waste and wantonness that he so hated, got up abruptly.

"I must go," he said. "I want to get back to town as soon as possible. I must go and look out a train."

The Crevequers protested. They didn't understand in the least what he felt about them and their ways. They didn't know that he couldn't breathe easily in that atmosphere of immoral idleness and unprincipled waste. Betty did indeed see that his forehead had contracted slightly ; but she supposed it to be the atmosphere of the aliens, not of Merrilies End. It would indeed have been rather a relief to have been able to say to the aliens, as they had said to the Bunters, " Come and bathe "—but that was out of the question, of course, with aliens, who aren't fond of water.

After all, Benjie didn't go till next morning, because there wasn't a train. He spent the evening with the Crevequers and the aliens, who jabbered to each other confidentially and volubly, and at intervals remarked to the rest of the company, with conscious virtue, " Veree poor men. Seek work." They might have spared themselves both remarks, as the first was obvious, and the second was regarded by Benjie as a lie, and by the Crevequers as the announcement of a quite misguided proceeding.

Louie didn't leave Merrilies End with Benjie ; after all, why should she, since in future their ways diverged ? The Crevequers pressed her to stay on a little, and she did. Unlike Benjie, she found it extraordinarily restful to be there. Between two difficult pieces of road, it was as if she had strayed into a green playground, and sat down to rest awhile. A merry Elysium, where one played children's games, and nothing mattered outside, and one stopped

fighting with the world, but let it carry one where it would, and hand-in-hand with the other children one walked expectant through the fair. . . .

It was, of course, all that Benjie disapproved of most. He shook its dust from his feet. He refused the guinea-pig that was offered to him, and went empty-handed away.

CHAPTER VIII

THE WAYFARING MAN

On Sundays the men of East Anglia stand in the road. They do not do anything in particular there ; it is the day of rest ; they just stand, and talk a little, and look at the girls going by to church or chapel or elsewhere. For the girls and women do not stand in the road much ; they have other things to do, and a practical feminine vigour of purpose. So they walk out, and take their chaps walking with them, unless they are seized with the annoying feminine desire to be inside a place of worship ; in that case their chaps either have to go in too, or wait for them in the road with the other chaps till they come out. Women are like that ; one has to put up with it. That they like to show off their Sunday clothes seems to their chaps the easiest explanation.

When one stands in the road, any little interest is welcome. Sunday afternoon games are not much in vogue in East Anglia, which has a strongly Protestant bias. After tea there is very often a Salvation Army, and that is more or less interesting, of course, and the band cheers one up. Sometimes for a week

or more on end there is a People's Van, in a field by the road, and that, too, has points. The Protestant sects show more skill in the matter of catching the outdoor Sunday-keepers than the National Church has yet displayed. When the Church comes out into the open fields—sends itinerant priests about the countryside to preach the gospel to the road-standers, then there will be less talk of the Church losing her hold on the people ; her attractions will be set forth, surely not in vain, before the eyes of those who spend their Sundays waiting to be interested in whatever comes along the road to interest them.

Towards the middle of a fine August a shabby old gypsy van made its appearance in the Cambridgeshire villages. It was driven by a pale young man in a dusty grey flannel suit and a soft dusty tweed hat, and he seemed to be a sort of carpenter, for his van was full of very firm and solid pieces of furniture—chairs and tables and benches, and massive things that he called settles, and corner cupboards, and carved mantel-pieces, that he tried to sell. Sound joiner's work, he said it was ; none of your cheap and nasty blocks and glue. And he offered to give carving lessons gratis in the evenings to anyone who cared to come. And when he wasn't trying to sell his furniture—and he didn't sell much of it, for Cambridgeshire on the whole opined that it was proper queer and wouldn't fit in with anything else in their houses—he was preaching in the village streets.

He came on a fine Sunday morning to Farley, and

drew up his van at the cross roads, where a group of the men of Farley were enjoying the air. They watched the new-comer's movements with detached interest. First he gave his horse a feed, bran out of a bucket, then a drink from the pump. Then he climbed on to the front seat of his van again, and thoughtfully ate two slices of brown bread and cheese, and drank a mug of beer. Meanwhile he looked about him, at the houses that lined the four roads, and frowned as he did so. The youths of Farley said, "Cheer up, old cock. Give us a bite, I say. *Yip*iaddy yi yi yi yi. Don't yer mind us; we ain't lookin' at yer, not 'alf. Speech, gov'ner. Enjies his food and drink, don' he. *Yip*iaddy. . . ." and so forth; exactly what the youths in other villages say on like occasions.

The young man did not appear to be noticing them particularly. But when he had finished his meal he turned and looked down on the little crowd, and said, in a soft, aggrieved, very young voice, "What perfectly beastly houses you have in Farley."

There was a growl of mixed laughter and disapproval.

"What's wrong with 'em? Pity 'e stays so long to look at 'em, ain't it. What are they like where *you* come from, eh, young cock? You mind your own business, and we'll mind ours. Englishman's 'ouse is 'is castle, *I* says. Farley 'ouses are good enough for Farley men."

"Obviously they are not," returned the young man in the van, "for you all prefer to stand in the road

rather than stay in them. I am with you there; I wouldn't stay in any of those houses for a moment if they were mine. Please don't think me rude . ."

Mockery here. " 'Ear that, Bert? We ain't to think 'im rude, the little pet. What price that van o' yours, any'ow, gov'ner? Some folks aven't got no 'ouse at all, and mayhap they find the grapes a bit sour."

" Some people," the young man agreed, " have no house at all. And other people have no van at all. One can be happy without either, though it is more comfortable to have one or the other. But my point is . . ." (" Now 'e's gettin' to it, Bert. You listen now.") . . . " that if you do have a house—or a van—it may as well be a reasonably constructed one—" (" Cut the words down, gov'ner. We don't pay you by the piece ")—" a decently built one. Now I ask you to look at these houses about us. That row there—Rosemary Villas, they appear to be called. Do you like them? "

Everyone looked at Rosemary Villas. Rosemary Villas were four in number, in two pairs of twins; they were of pale yellow brick, and had curiously battlemented porches, and a great deal of wall-space, and a minimum of blue slate roof. Rosemary Villas were typical of the new Cambridgeshire architecture which is displacing the old thatched and whitewashed cottage. Fresh Rosemary Villas spring to birth like mushrooms in a night.

The men of Farley considered Rosemary Villas, and passed a favourable verdict.

" What's the 'arm ? " enquired someone. " New, they are. Ain't done you any 'arm, old chap, 'ave they ? Why can't you let 'em be, then ? They're good enough for Farley."

The sententious young man said, " They're bad enough for a much worse place. Look here now, why do you let the cheap builder spoil your village like that ? Why don't you get your houses properly architected ? I know why, of course. Yoy think you're being economical. The speculative builder builds the house that costs him as little as possible ; well, he's merely taking money out of the pockets of the people who've got to live in it. D'you think a house like that *lasts* ? D'you think it can be repaired ? I tell you, in thirty years those slate roofs will want renewing, and when you want to reroof you'll find those cheap roof-timbers shrunk and warped so you can't do anything with them. And the foundations —do you know what sort of foundations a house like that has ? I can tell you one thing about them— they're foundations that can only be made good by complete underpinning, and I couldn't afford that if it was my house. Why Rosemary Villas would *come down* if a big motor van passed along this road. *That's* the sort of house you get by letting the speculative builder have his head. Now we turn to the *in*side . . ."

A choleric faced man had come up during the last two minutes with his wife and daughter. They were on their way back from chapel—chapel and church, yielding up their worshippers, were considerably

swelling the lecturer's audience—and had stopped to listen, arrested by a remark as to the habits of the speculative builder. When the young man turned to the inside, he stepped forward and said, "Excuse *me*."

A mild cheer backed him up. "That's right, Mr. Potts; you give it 'im. 'Ere's the man you've bin talkin' about, gov'ner. 'Ere's the man as builds the villas."

The young man in the van raised his tweed hat politely. "I'm awfully pleased to meet you, Mr. Potts. Did you hear what I was saying?"

"I did that," said Mr. Potts, "and I'd like you to hear what *I've* got to say, young feller. I don't allow any man to come along and say my houses are going to come down, *nor* that I'm taking money out of any other man's pocket. It's the first time anyone's said that of me, and it'll be the last. Why, I could give you in charge for libel, *and* for brawling in the road, if I had a mind. What's wrong with the houses, eh? Come down at a van, would they? You drive yours along and try." ("That's one in the eye for you, young chap, ain't it? You do as 'e says, an' we'll walk be'ind and pick up the pieces. You an' your van! Give it 'im 'ot, Mr. Potts.") "What's your game young feller?" proceeded Mr. Potts. "Want to collar the Farley building trade, do you? One o' them *harchitects*, that's what he is," he informed the audience, with concentrated bitterness on the word.

"I assure you," explained the young man, eagerly,

"I have no sort of interest in the architecting or building trades. I am entirely disinterested—except that I make tables and chairs, and of course I should like to sell them; but I hadn't come to that yet. As to the houses themselves, I have *no* game except to get rid of the buildings which disfigure our lovely Cambridgeshire villages. Now I ask you, all of you—look at them. Do you think they are *nice* to look at?"

Verdict was given that they were. "Talk of disfigurin' the villages. What price you an' your old van?"

"I and my van," said the young man, good-tempered but contentious, "are transitory disfigurements. We are not rooted in the soil, as Rosemary Villas (however insecurely) are. Look at them again. Look at the larger house opposite them, with the gate-posts . . ."

"Mr. Potts built Northcote, too," he was informed. "Didn't yer, Mr. Potts? That's a good 'ouse, Northcote is."

"And look at that row of cottages to the left . . ."

"'Old on, gov'ner. That's where I live. What's wrong, eh?"

The young man's words seemed to fail him. He took off his hat and ran his fingers through his dark hair, that was damp with the heat.

"They're so ugly," he said weakly. "Don't you *see* they're ugly? Oh, you *ought* to see it. They're immoral."

Derisive shouts. "Go on, Reverend. Sunday

morning, ain't it. Chuck 'im out, the fool. We've 'ad enough of your jaw. You let our 'omes alone, an' we'll let you alone. That's fair an' straight. What d'yer want, comin' an' disturbin' us on a Sunday, an' abusin' of our 'omes ? Chuck it, we tell yer, or you'll wish yer 'ad. Eh, Mr. Potts ? "

The young man said, " But I want to show you some designs of nicer houses. When you see them you *must* like them better." He held up before them a large coloured drawing of the type of cottage that flourished in our Garden Cities.

Clean and sharp a flint went through the deep tiled roof. Another followed ; a smart fusilade had begun in a second. The drawing was in tatters before it could be put out of the way. The shower of small stones continued after the drawing was removed. One of them cut the young man's lip open ; others bruised his face and head and rained about his shoulders. The crowd had suddenly got rather annoyed.

"'Ere, that'll do," said someone after a moment or two. " Don't kill the pore chap. We've learnt 'im 'is lesson now, and don't you forget it, young fellow. You can do what you like in Farley as long as you keep a civil tongue ; but when you begin abusin' of better men than yourself, *or* their 'omes, we've got to learn you. See ? "

" I see no sort of justification for your absolutely unwarrantable attack," said the young man, very white and sick-looking, and mopping his lip. " I made no remarks that could be considered in the

least offensive. . . ." his voice trailed away; he was feeling rather queer, having been struck about the head.

"Know better next time, won't you, old man," they told him, now encouraging and sympathetic, and even compassionate.

"No," he said, which was probably true, and slipped sideways and fell out of his seat on to the road and lay still.

Farley is full of human kindness. It resents insult, but has pity on the wounded wayfaring man, though a fool. It picked him up and supported his head and said, "Give 'im air. Any first-aid men 'ere? Any brandy about? Call at the Cow and say as 'ow a *bonâ fide* 'as fainted. Comin' round, 'e is."

The indignant Mr. Potts came to the fore in a truly Christian manner, and offered to take him into his own house.

"'E wouldn't like that, though, would 'e?" someone said doubtfully, "with the down 'e 'as on 'ouses. Make 'im bilious, it might. Lor, ain't 'e a cove! One o' them Socialists, I should say. Let's take 'im in to the doctor's."

So they took him in to the doctor's, and the doctor soon rescuscitated him. The doctor was told, "The boys threw a few stones—not to 'urt 'im like—but just to learn 'im a lesson to keep a civil tongue. 'E was abusin' of our 'ouses, like a ravin' lunatic. No one meant to 'urt 'im, you know, sir—but 'e put 'is 'ead in the way an' got it, that's 'ow it was."

When the victim returned to consciousness he

saw the doctor's rather long, melancholy face above him.

"Coming round, are you? That's right." The doctor's voice was a sad bass; he was a disillusioned and unhappy person of thirty or so.

The young man sat up and said querulously, "Asses. What did they want to do that for?"

"What," inquired the sad doctor, "did you want to insult their houses for?"

"Only for their good. Would you have everyone stand aside and do nothing to keep back this ghastly tide?"

"Live and let live," said the doctor. "People are happier with the things they like than with the things you think they ought to like. It's all a question of personal taste. Who are you to impose yours?"

"That's a hopelessly immoral principle. Surely we ought all to be trying. . . ."

The doctor sighed, "Will you have some lunch?"

"Thanks; I have had mine. I must get back to my van. I want to exhibit some furniture this afternoon."

"You are not satisfied with your experience of Farley yet, then?"

"Certainly not. Quite dissatisfied. I shall persevere."

"You are perverse, and utterly in the wrong. You are a meddler, I see. I won't wish you luck. They surmise out there that you are one of them Socialists. That hypothesis, you will observe, covers

a multitude of vagaries. Thank you, I make no charge for my mild services. It would be unjust, for I think you would not have requested them of your own will. Go to your van, and tell Farley ladies how criminal their chairs are. I will then doctor you again, and I will charge you for that, if you will. May I ask if you are making a long stay in Farley ? "

" I shall move on to-morrow. I shall go through Saxford, Dorcote, and Little Leathmarch, and along the London road."

" You would be happier selling boot-laces. There is a demand for boot-laces. I am in want of a boot-lace myself at this moment. But to you demand is nothing ; you turn a deaf ear and say, ' You are mistaken ; what you really want is a model cottage.' If you think to hypnotise Cambridgeshire into believing you, you have much disillusionment before you. Go your way : your genus must always buy more experience than it can rightly afford."

The young man went his way, to buy it, and the sad doctor went to his lunch.

No ; Farley on the whole didn't want queer-looking things like that. Besides, that did seem funny, hawkin' on Sunday. What would the Minister say, or the Vicar either ?

What the Vicar did say when he came along the village street before Catechism was, " You shouldn't be selling on Sunday, my man ; you know that quite well."

The young man said, with regret, that he wasn't selling.

The Vicar said he was impertinent, and was breaking the law.

The young man explained, at some length, that it was not a good law.

The Vicar said, " I see you are a character. Known better days, haven't you ? "

The young man said he hadn't, but that he hoped to in some future era. Before that era, one must clear away obstructionist laws.

The Vicar said, till that era one must keep them. He added, " I should have thought you had had enough of social reform this morning. By the way, I wish you would not provide counter attractions during service hours. Why not come inside, instead ? '

The young man said civilly that he was not a church-goer.

The Vicar said, " It is a pity so many of you Socialists should take that line. If you only knew it, you would find the kernel of your gospel inside the church doors. It is just the place where you do find it—and nowhere else that I know of. By the kernel I mean the good. You leave the bad outside."

The young man said, " Exactly."

The Vicar said, " What do you mean by 'exactly' ? "

The young man started to explain, but three o'clock struck and the Vicar had to hurry away to Catechism. The young man was disappointed, for the Vicar had hit the right nail on the head,

and must be a person of intelligence and worth explaining to. His last words were, "If I hear of your hawking again to-day, I must give you in charge, you know."

After that the young man merely set out his solid benches, settles, stools, chairs and tables in the road to be looked at, and himself sat on one of them and worked at a half-made chair, and occasionally told the spectators how well he was doing it. He was, rather. He had been a blacksmith at one time, but it had been borne in upon him of late that his true vocation was that of a carpenter.

Farley, during the odd moments it could spare from its other pursuits, watched him kindly. Touched in the head, of course, poor chap; but seemed a good-natured fellow, and bore no malice for his treatment in the morning. And a bit of a wag in his way, they found; could give an answer back, to the Vicar or any other man. "And him with a black eye and a cut lip, too, pore young chap," said the Farley ladies. So they were quite nice to him on the whole. though that did seem queer, carpenterin' in the road on a Sunday, and makin' things, too, as folks wouldn't have in their front parlours not if they was paid for it. But the pore young fellow was for the most part suffered gladly, even when he boasted about how good his furniture was—not in the best of taste, that, but then what would you have? Hawkers will be hawkers, till the last day and after.

When the vicar of Farley looked down the church from the pulpit that evening, he saw at the back

the pale, square-jawed face of the young hawker frowning up at him with intent brows over solemn blue eyes. The Vicar felt rather pleased. He had, it seemed, sown a good seed in this young man; anyhow here he was, he who had said he was not a churchgoer. He had come, perhaps, to find the kernel of his gospel inside the church doors. By the kernel, one means the good . . . one leaves the bad outside . . . Exactly, said the young man. So here he was, having come along to find it.

The Vicar, who had been preparing to preach on the discontent of the Israelites in the wilderness, from the text, "And they murmured against him," hastily altered his mind and gave out "Love one another." That he was able to do that showed him to be what the pedlar had thought him, a person of intelligence. Not every Vicar has such resource, and such independence of the written word.

It was rather a good sermon. These golden ages, these millenniums, he said, that social reformers talk of, what are they but the coming of the kingdom of love? And what is that but the simple obeying of the simplest of Christian precepts? Simple, yes—easy, no. Those who think to fulfil even elementarily this simplest of precepts in their own strength will find it too mighty a task. Those who think to establish the reign of love without the aid of religion are like wayfaring men who are out of the highway. But there is a highway, and it shall be a way, and wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein. . . . (Apparently Farley had made up its mind,

people and parson both, as to the intellectual equipment of the young man in the van ; he must have been getting a little tired of that.) There was quite a lot more of it, and it was all rather good (this Vicar's sermons were), and decidedly the kernel of the pedlar's gospel, or of any other right-minded gospel, including the Vicar's. The point about kernels is that they are all very much alike. It is the nuts that hold them that differ so. The object is to have a nut that can be cracked by the average person. Or to find a way, if one is to talk, like the Vicar, of roads. Here you are, said the Vicar—here is your highway. Exactly the question, said the young man at the back ; *is* it our highway ? Will it not only take itself but carry us, the wayfaring fools, to the goal ? Has it constraining power for that ? Will it carry us, like a horse ? Otherwise where is the good of the road running emptily to the goal, and the wayfaring fools lying in the ditch, asleep, left to themselves ? Prove the constraining power of your road, and we will all take it, we who want to arrive. For to arrive, thought the vigorous young man of purpose, scorning a classic saying, is better than to travel, however hopefully.

The organ broke softly into " Lead, kindly light." Again the same opinion expressed, though the music was bad. Well, who knows but that it may be right ? Fair-minded persons suspend their judgments, give those they do not agree with the benefit of any doubt there may be. This carpenter always did so ; he was very fair-minded.

He came out of church and repaired to his van and held a carving class. The weak point of the carving class was that no one seemed to want to learn carving. But he had several people to look at him performing in solitary beauty, and that must have educated them a little, one hoped.

The life of a reformer is a lonely life, often. He needs faith and hope and much philosophy, for his function is to reform and reform, and it remains often an intransitive verb, and he fights as one that beats the air. If he is young and of a good spirit and liked of life, he can continue cheerfully, and he is in his rights so long as he does that. But directly he sees bitterness approaching, he must lay down his arms and repair to the fair with wiser men; his child's game is spoilt.

This young man, perhaps because his head ached with its morning's battering, lay down that night against a rick beneath the stars with a little wave of bitterness lapping against the strong wall of his spirit. He had things to give, and no one would receive. He pointed the right way, and was received with jesting tolerance or a rain of stones. The good, the beautiful, the sane—he offered them, and they were spurned with contempt. "We want," people told him, "what we have got; the bad, the ugly, the mad. We like it." "You shouldn't like it," said the young man. But if they just did, what then? *Was* that the all-important thing, the last word, or wasn't it? . . .

Chilly night winds crept and shivered round the

rick. The young man dived deeper into his sack, and slept.

A grey pale morning, still full of the stars and a dying moon, saw the young man and the old horse and van taking the pale road in the twilight hush before the birds began, while still only the little night winds crept about, and the van wheels strangely stirred yesterday's white dust. East and west and north and south flat lands spread in silence, grey and unlit and very quiet, and slow streams ran about them, sedged and willow-edged, and over all the wan moon drooped and died. If ghosts should dream, and tell their dreams in whispers . . . yes, it would probably be like that. Only the matter-of-fact young man of the van did not think that ghosts could dream. His eyes were on a distant spire—a pale, transparent grey point in the north-east. That much of a city caught the eye, dominating the plains about it ; that and a shorter, square tower, and something with four pinnacles. To the thus indicated city the dusty road ran straight ; the van was passing a blurred milestone that said " Cambridge 10."

Somewhere to the east of the spire a rosy bar of cloud came and lay across green twilight. With it the hush of the ghosts' dream was shivered and pierced as by a thousand silver bells, for the birds broke out, first singly, like horns to wake a sleeping world, then in swelling, rioting chorus, shouting madly for the sun. Some people think that the day is born for itself, without help from the birds. That is

not easy to think if one is out on the roads at dawn, and sees the thing at work. The young man in the van saw how each fresh burst of summoning music called up a new wave of pure gold, till all the east was a golden lake that surged and surged and eddied over the pale sky, so that the faint spire stood dark and fine against light. That was only for a moment ; in the next the grey came down, and it was but a poor sunrise after all—a moment's golden smile over a singing earth, then a plunge into blue clouds, and the early silver rain slanting over the willows and pelting the young man's face and darkly spotting the soft dust.

But after that it was a bright and shiny morning, and smelt of rained-on dust and wet fields, and the young man said, " Cluck, cluck ! Get on, Richard," to his horse, and whistled a tune and munched a slice of bread and marmalade, and was happy.

That morning he stopped in several villages and tried to sell chairs. It was no use getting on the stump, because it was a work day. It wasn't much use trying to sell chairs either, particularly as it was washing-day. This young man had tried to learn all about the working-classes (as people insist on calling them—you can't stop it), he had even married a wife partly with that end ; but he didn't quite always remember washing-day, which was silly of him. You must not bother people on Mondays and Saturdays ; that seems a simple rule, but it is not always kept by the well-intentioned. It came back to the hawker of chairs very soon, though,

and he called himself a fool, and pushed on to Cambridge.

Into Cambridge he came at noon, and found it a deserted August city, full of people and the sun. The Long Vacation term was over. But the young man put up his horse and van in an inn yard, and walked to St. Martin's College, and crossed the court and called up at a daisied window-box for " Jerry," in the descending scale of two notes to which courts are used.

A tranquil, attractive face appeared among the daisies. Jerry was never startled or surprised. He said, " Hullo, Benjie. Come up and lunch. Brown bread and marmalade ; lots of it."

Benjie came up, in to a restful green room that adequately combined comfort and grace, so that it was obvious that the owner valued both very much. It was full of big, squashy cushions, artistically embroidered, and easy chairs, pleasantly enough shaped to satisfy even the young man of the van, and John drawings and Arthur Rackhams and Aubrey Beardsleys, and Japanese paintings and lacquer work ; the room, in short, of a young man who knew what he liked and was at pains to get it. At mild pains, that is ; for Jerry Bunter never bothered much ; things had a knack of dropping into his hands when he desired them. He was a restful but untidy person. He was dressed in flannels and a blazer and canvas shoes and no socks, and was eating slices of brown bread and marmalade, with Blake's illustrations of the Book of Job open at

his elbow, and a towel over the back of his chair.

He got out a plate and knife for Benjie, and cut him a large slice of bread, and passed him the marmalade and then turned over a page of Job, remarking, "I'm going home to-morrow. Are you having a nice time?"

Benjie considered it. "Yes," he decided. "Quite nice. In spite of a few *contretemps*. I am not much liked. I am considered rude, and in bad form, and a harchitect, and a sabbath-breaker, and a Socialist, and quite an ass."

Jerry nodded, glancing at his brother's scarred lip and discoloured brow. "I expect so," he agreed. "That's just what you are, you know; all those things, except the harchitect. More bread? I'd come with you for a bit if you would take an off time for a few days. I should like the travelling, and I shouldn't mind your selling chairs, but I should object to the preaching part. It looks as if it had been rather painful, too. What about going easy for a bit, and taking me with you, and travelling to the coast? Then you could drop me at home, and go off by yourself again on the stump. It's such lovely weather for being on the roads; it does seem waste to mix it up with business."

Benjie said, "Don't be a rotter. I've no days to waste; life isn't long enough. You haven't grasped the point. Life is real, life is earnest, and so forth. And I'm going on with this job till it chucks me."

Jerry looked at him tolerantly. Benjie and he were close friends. It was a pity they couldn't always see eye to eye.

"Converting people," he murmured, turning it over as if it were a mathematical problem he couldn't solve. "Well, I expect it's no good my trying to understand. . . . It's extraordinarily nice being up in the middle of August, Benjie. No one bothers one. I've done a lot of work, and I sleep down by the river, and this afternoon I'm going to bathe. I'm rather sorry I'm going home to-morrow."

"What are they all about at home? I gather from mother's letters that they have been coming across those people at Merrilies End."

"Yes. They motored over to call, and to ask if you were at home or something. Father was shocked; but mother says, 'poor children how should they know better?' I want to meet them very much; they sound attractive, and I want to get some drawings from them, if they're still selling any. They're only ten miles from us, aren't they? Father used to know their old cousin that lived there before, apparently —met him on benches and so on. So different, so respectable, mother says. They sound an acquisition, these people. You like them, don't you?"

"No. I've no opinion of them. They encourage wastrels. They're wastrels themselves, in fact. Rather pernicious, that type; they do no end of harm."

"Well, they seem to be attached to you, for some reason. They've asked us all to a garden-party,

apparently. Mother says one doesn't know whom one mayn't meet there—the sweep, you know, and ladies from music halls, and Roman Catholic priests, and all sorts of aliens, and wicked people whom no one calls on. That is the impression she has got of them ; I don't know why, quite. Anyhow they must be rather nice, and I shall go and see them. . . . Shall you come home at all this summer ? "

" I fancy not," Benjie said, absently. " Too busy."

He was silent, and forgot his bread and marmalade. Suddenly he broke out, violently, " They ruin everything and everyone they touch, people like that. They're—they're pernicious."

Jerry opened his brown eyes a little. Benjie was seldom heated. He seemed quite excited now—like Cecil. Jerry thought excitement always superfluous.

" Oh, I expect not," he said, tranquilly. " Not more than the rest of the idle classes, are they ? "

Benjie said abruptly, " Much more," but did not explain further, and Jerry left the point of friction, as he always did, having been born a blessed peacemaker.

" Come and bathe at Grantchester," he said. " We'll get tea at the Orchard."

So they rowed up a slow, weedy river, between foaming billows of meadowsweet, and landed and bathed beneath a weir, and lay in a field, and had a large tea, with muffins, at the Orchard. Jerry was certainly a maker, or a finder, of peace. He made

straight tracks for it, and its aroma hung always about him, resting his companions. Benjie, eating muffins beneath the apple tree, cool after his bathe, nearly forgot that he had a mission, a wife, a black eye, no opinion of wastrels, and no home he could approve of; and he and Jerry talked about fishing and pictures and Cambridge people and nothing at all, till they landed in the dusk at the mill pool, and went their separate ways.

CHAPTER IX

BEGGARS ON HORSEBACK

"DEAR me, yes," said Lady Lettice, answering a bishop's wife, who was feeling shocked (they were at the Crevequers' garden-party), "all sorts and conditions, aren't we? Yes. Of course I bow to *nearly* everyone; so important for Mervyn, you know. You don't think it's bowing in the house of Rimmon, do you? I do hope it's not. And of course one makes exceptions; one must. Those dreadful Donovans, for instance; yes, I looked the other way. I couldn't face them. Mervyn did; he bowed. He must, you know. Oh, quite beyond the pale, of course; the man divorced his wife, and is tipsy every morning on the Barrow road. So revolting; and dangerous for the car, too; he reels right across the road in front of it. Anderson says, if there *is* an accident, the man will only have himself to blame. But most unpleasant for all of us, of course. And the girls carry on with trainers and jockeys from Newmarket. Such hard complexions, haven't they? And *such* a set of men they've got about them—just look; no,

you'd better not. Some of them their brothers, and some not at all. So horsey, all of them. Really, the Crevequers should be warned; how *did* they pick up with them? But they've no discrimination, it seems. Oh, I assure you, the Donovans aren't the worst; there are some poor creatures with paint on their faces, and *such* accents! Stage, obviously. Of course there are actors and actors, and one doesn't want to be a prude, and really now-a-days some London actors and actresses are so nearly that one can quite ask them, you know—but these poor things must be from the provinces. Hugh says they're a touring company from Marle, doing some awful melodrama. Well, I suppose one should be democratic, as Benjie always says. What a pity he's not here; he would enjoy himself among all these unfortunate creatures. Quite submerged, aren't they, and that's what he likes. Poor boy, he is still going about in a cart; such queer tastes he always had. One hoped when he parted from poor dear Louie (*so* unfortunate, that whole business, but one is thankful that they should give up trying to live together, though there they are, tied for life, and one doesn't so far see any way out. I always told Benjie how it would be)—one hoped, you know, that he would settle down and become more like other people; but no, off he must go in a closed cart, and make chairs, and preach in the roads against people's houses. So tactless. Who could be expected to stand it; and so, of course, no one buys his chairs. Jerry says they throw stones at him instead, poor

darling boy. But nothing will induce him to give it up and go into a sensible profession. It's so absurd, he's hardly making a penny, and I know he sends his private income to his wife, and says he earns enough to live on himself, and he has no ambition whatever, so there it is. Quite ridiculous, isn't it? But I wish he was here to-day; he would be in his element. He loves improving people, and here is a whole garden full who look as if they needed it. There's Lady Fenchurch cutting a Donovan girl; poor girl, she shouldn't have tried that on."

The bishop's wife said she imagined many of the reputable guests were feeling so insulted that they would hardly come again. "Someone ought to tell these extraordinary young people that we country folk don't like our prejudices to be rough-ridden like this. I feel sure they don't *mean* to insult anyone, so they would be glad to know."

"So distressing, isn't it," agreed Lady Lettice. "The respectable people are being insulted by meeting the disreputable ones, and the disreputable ones by being cut by the respectable. Yes. So there we all are. But good for elections, I suppose. I really half believe those kind young creatures have that in their minds, for Mervyn was talking to them about the autumn election the other day, and how uncertain his seat is, because, as he says, he *won't* truckle to the undesirables. He won't seek them out, you know; he doesn't think it dignified; you know what Mervyn is. And those children said, 'We'll have a garden-party, and ask everybody, undesirables and

desirables and all—in fact, we don't know which is which; but if we ask everyone it will be safe, and then you can meet them all.' And this, I suppose, is the result. Quite complete, isn't it. And Mervyn really is unbending, I see, even to the undesirables. Look, he's talking to the vet."

The bishop's wife said, of course if the garden-party was a piece of election machinery, it explained itself.

"I didn't know our engaging host and hostess were such good politicians. In fact, from their apparently rather democratic tastes, I should have expected their sympathies to be with the other side."

"Oh, we're all democrats now, aren't we? Taking up the poor, you know, and all that. But to tell the truth I don't fancy the Crevequers know very much about politics; they were brought up mostly abroad, you see. Only they are quite ready to believe Mervyn, and so anxious for him to succeed. They're rather fond of Benjie, too; not that Benjie sees eye to eye with his father, poor boy, though I was pleased to hear him say not long ago that he didn't approve of Liberalism. Such a relief, because he used always to be such a dreadful Radical. But I don't think he's the least bit a Tory either, really; I always tell him he ought to be more sympathetic to his father about politics. Dear me, there's Cecil talking to the tax-collector. Now ought I to allow that? They both look so animated, too. Such a little wretch—asks all kind of provoking questions about one's house,

and then assesses it ever so much too high. A dissenter, too, poor creature, and dreadfully upstart. Of course Cecil lets him talk. She always will argue with Dick, Tom, and Harry about all kinds of things she had better leave alone except with people of her own sort. So very rash ; one doesn't know *where* that will end, does one? This dreadful democratic disease again. Cecil has it as badly as Benjie. And having no mother, you know . . . Now what *can* that little man be saying to her ? "

He was only telling her about Enlightened Congregationalists, and how they are quite different from Baptists, and how since the new minister had come he had put everything on a broader basis, and shown how a self-respecting man can be religious, too—but no creeds, of course, or superstitious beliefs, which self-respecting men don't need, and if a man needs that to help him to live straight, etc. . . . All very true, and one had heard it before, but Cecil, though not interested in Enlightened Congregationalism, was by way of being interested in tax-collectors and such, so she didn't look as if she thought him trite, an impolite habit of hers with those Lady Lettice called people of her own sort. But she did try to lead him on from this mid-Victorian, Tennysonesque delving into the foundations of belief to something more practical and up-to-date. That is to say, she propounded her idea of an Arts, Crafts and Discussion Club in one of the neighbouring villages. Mainly discussion, but arts

and crafts to give solidity and keep members amused.

"It's by way of keeping people's interest alive in things, till the Time comes," she explained.

"I see your point," said the tax-collector, not asking what time she meant, because he preferred to seem to know, and because he was more interested in what he said to her than in what she said to him. But he didn't score, for she got in next all the same.

"That is what my cousin is doing, you know. Going about the villages, waking up interest, and making people think. Preparing the ground for when it's time to act. I said I'd try to do the same down here, and at my own home. When we have these clubs everywhere, things will begin to wake up a bit. Particularly women ought to join, because women are such slackers about using their minds; and when we get votes . . . It will prepare the way for that, too, you see."

"*I* see your point," said the tax-collector, nodding intelligently. "Though, as to that, I am what you might call a bit of a heretic, Miss Bunter. But we'll let that slide; I don't want to start such a hot topic at a party—particularly as we men are badly outnumbered here, and might get the worst of it!"

If Cecil's eyes said "Don't be silly," her lips at least refrained. She was certainly on her politest behaviour. She merely said, "Well, will you help with the club?" and he looked rather pleased, and said he would by all means give her any assistance

in his power. He thought she was rather pretty, though too pale, and talked too much and too fast, but not bad at listening, which talkers often are. Anyhow, she wasn't a primrosey Tory, like her uncle and aunt; obviously she had sound Radical sympathies, though a bit of a crank, like that Socialist cousin of hers whom she seemed so full of; probably she was in love with him, and all this Arts, Crafts and Discussion business, and keeping people's interests alive, was, as she said, merely till the time came—the time when he could finally get rid of that poor wife of his, whom already, as everyone knew, he had deserted and left to herself. That is what happens, all poor men know, when the upper classes marry the daughters of the people. The tax-collector pulled his auburn moustache and smiled a little cynically, though quite pleasantly, as the young lady proceeded to propound the plans in which he was to help.

A noise of fiddling suddenly began in a corner of the garden—a queer plaintive cracked ghost of a happy tune. One of the Crevequers' undesirables had brought a fiddle with him, it seemed, or possibly had strayed into the garden uninvited to see if they had a use for music there. No other hosts would have had a use for such a musician as this—a vagabond foreign person, not clean. But the Crevequers, to whose mill all was grist, gave him coffee and sandwiches and bade him play a tune. So he tuned up and played his broken-down dance music, that had been good music once, and the Crevequers, catching

each other by the hands, danced together on the lawn, and others of the very young laughed and followed suit, till there were a dozen couples jigging round.

The tax-collector asked Miss Bunter if he might have the pleasure, and so they two were off together, for Cecil loved dancing and thought it rather fun to dance with the tax-collector instead of with some stupid squireling or parson's son. That was the Idea; mix us all up and prepare our minds—till the Time comes. And a few other people, who knew and cared nothing for the Idea, or the Time, thought it rather a sporting plan, and young gentlemen asked the ladies of the "Trapped Alive" company (poor creatures) to dance, and found them rather good fun; and Miss Crevequer herself danced with the company's comedian, and both seemed to be enjoying it, and her brother took a stodgy little dentist's daughter who was looking sad because no one had asked her, and the Miss Donovans had a great time with the horsey men who weren't their brothers.

Hugh Bunter had no intention of dancing; he was looking on, as usual, and being unenergetic and placid and amused. But Betty Crevequer came up to him and said, "Oh, *d-do* you mind asking that child Tommy's just left to dance with you? She's frightfully keen, and Tommy has to go and dance with Miss Poppy Prince—she asked him just now—and the child looks so lonely all by herself. Please, will you?"

Hugh sighed, but went. He seldom refused to do what he was asked. So he led out the dentist's stodgy daughter, and she kicked him and hurt him, and dragged on his arm and made him tired, and said it was a lovely party, and he smiled in his pleasant way and agreed that it was. It was a great thing to be as agreeable as Hugh, even if one wasn't much interested in life. Why anyone should want to dance on a lawn to a cracked fiddle passed Hugh's comprehension. The Crevequer attitude towards life was interesting to him as a study. Hugh himself enjoyed things (placidly) when he saw that they were good. The rest he put aside, as irrelevant to him. He was fastidious. The Crevequers seemed to enjoy things irrespectively of any merit therein. They were omnivorous consumers of life; not fastidious at all. They took and used all that came their way, and if nothing came their way they were somehow not at a loss even then. And they had a useful knack of making, with naïve simplicity, large requests, and getting them granted. They seemed both to take and give with open hands.

But they couldn't make Jerry Bunter dance; he loved them, but he shook his head and smiled his engaging, friendly smile at them, and retreated. He hated dancing, and he was shy of ladies. He couldn't understand Cecil's wanting to dance with the tax-collector, who was surely a bore, and his voice on a high pitch that jarred. But Cecil's taste, good in some ways, was lacking in others—like Benjie's. Jerry didn't, as a rule, frequent garden parties; he

had no use for social functions; but he liked the Crevequers, and so he had come, in his untidy old flannels and floppy hat, which he had assumed under protest, since he seldom wore a hat at all. (In Cambridge you needn't much, except when you are being polite, and that Jerry seldom was.)

He had a quite happy time, lounging about the garden and meeting disreputable animals, and talking to a Crevequer whenever opportunity offered. When he told Tommy he wanted to buy some of his drawings, Tommy promptly said, "Stay the night," and Jerry said, "Thank you, I should like to," and so that was arranged. Tommy added, "At least, I hope there's a room for you. A lot of people are staying here to-night; I haven't an idea how many, or who. They turn up, and we take them all in. We often don't know who we're having till bedtime; then we count them. Some of them have beds in the garden; they like it." Jerry said he should prefer a bed in the garden; he always had one at home in fine weather. Obviously these people kept open house for wastrels and others, and went on the beds-for-all-who-come principle. Servants do not always like this.

The fiddler abruptly ended, and the dancers stopped. Jerry saw Hugh's polite relief, and Cecil and the tax-collector going off together, talking still. Mr. Mervyn Bunter saw that, too, and cleared his throat and stepped forward as they passed, and said, "Cecil, your aunt wants you." He took no notice of the tax-collector, a notorious Liberal whom he

disliked. Cecil nodded to her partner and said, " I shall see you again later, perhaps, and then we'll settle more," and went away with her uncle. The tax-collector heard Mr. Bunter say to her, in his discreet sotto voce, " I think you have seen quite enough of that not very desirable person for this afternoon, my dear Cecil. *Alia tempora alii mores*, I know—but still, one can't afford to altogether lose sight of the old played-out distinctions. Or is breeding quite a back number in these days of enlightenment ? "

The tax-collector, his face turning a dull red, saw the little wriggle of Cecil's shoulders, which meant that her uncle was on her nerves ; it comforted his hurt, sensitive vanity a little, for she must like him, to wriggle like that. He tugged his moustache, grimly. He despised Mr. Bunter with a healthy, whole-hearted scorn, fed now by personal bitterness. The pompous fool. Splitting his infinitives, too. Any board school child would know better than that, breeding or not. And kow-towing to scamps like old Donovan, to pick a vote here and a vote there out of the gutter ; while those whose principles were known to be unalterable didn't get so much as a nod. Hadn't Miss Bunter herself said that this absurd garden party was got up partly to help her uncle at the next election ? The Crevequers, she had said, had offered to do all they could for Mr. Bunter, to make friends and use persuasion. Bribery and corruption, it patently was. All this offering of lodging and hospitality, and the pauperising of the

poor that was notoriously ruining the countryside round Merrilies End—that was all going to be used to help Mr. Bunter to keep his ridiculous seat.

Mr. Hancock suddenly felt the air of Merrilies End contaminated, stifling, as Benjamin Bunter had once felt it. He was an honest, intelligent, sensitive, prejudiced young man, badly hurt, and he said a stiff good-bye to his hostess and walked away.

"Oh, I do hope he enjoyed himself," murmured Miss Crevequer, looking after him. "He l-looks as if perhaps he hadn't . . . I wonder if he'd like a guinea-pig?"

"He's only mourning because Cecil has been torn from him," Hugh explained at her elbow. "Those two have obviously discovered each other to be kindred souls. Most touching."

The tax-collector, walking home, came upon a closed cart drawn up on the grass beside the sea-road, and outside it a young man boiling a pot and stirring the contents with a long spoon, in his usual careful, interested, absorbed way. The tax-collector knew him by sight and pretended he didn't. He had at least three reasons for wanting to annoy him, so he stopped to do so, and said, "Good-evening."

The young man, like his family, thought the tax-collector pitched his voice unpleasantly high, but he didn't really mind about such things himself. He said, "Good evening. Will you have some supper? It is just on ready. I shall give it three minutes and a half more. I have two clean plates."

"Thanks, no," said the tax collector. "Just had my tea. Had it up there." He jerked his head backwards. "At Merrilies End, or whatever they call the place."

Benjie nodded, and stirred. The smell of stew stole about, mixing with the little wind that breathed of sea and marsh. Across the wide flat lands to the west, sea lavender glowed under a pink sky.

The tax-collector wondered what the young man stirring, with his tongue between his teeth and the firelight flickering over his downbent, absorbed face, thought of his father's views on breeding, and elections, and infinitives, and not very desirable persons, and old played-out distinctions. And he wondered what the young man thought of his young cousin, who had swallowed his ideas whole and was preparing the ground for him and waiting for the Time. Also what the deserted wife thought of the young cousin.

He said, "A great political party they're having over there. It's a got-up thing, they all say."

"Yes?" The young man was polite, but still absorbed in stirring. He could only attend to one thing at a time, always. Some minds are like that —tenacious, but too concentrated. The tax-collector was determined to divert his interest from the pot to the political party.

"Our member, you know, doesn't .like to go out of his way to make friends with the undesirables among his constituents; it's lowering, and looks bad. So he gets his friends to collect them all

together at a party, where he can do a little quiet kow-towing against the autumn election. He isn't half safe in the saddle, you see. Rather a wily old customer. He and those young Crevequers are hatching a regular plot between them. They keep open house up there, to get on the soft side of the voter, I suppose. Well, I know that for a fact, for I had it from our worthy member's niece an hour ago, and I presume she knows. They're pauperising the countryside for miles around; shameful it is, undermining economic life and moral character the way they're doing. One hears they fill the house with vagabonds and beggars day and night. Everyone who asks gets, up there. It's a disgrace. One can't do any good with the people if there's that working against one. You've discovered that yourself, I daresay, Mr. Bunter," he added, forgetting himself.

Mr. Bunter had. He had stopped stirring, and had been listening to the irritated young man with his attentive frown. The last words revealed a lack of taste in the speaker that annoyed him a good deal. He said, "You know my name, then?" and frowned more.

The tax-collector coloured. He coloured easily; he was a sensitive person. "Perhaps I should beg your pardon for being so outspoken, Mr. Bunter. But facts are facts, and you're not on your father's side in politics, I know."

"My father," answered Benjie, unhooking his pot from its tripod and smelling it (it smelt good,

though it had been stewing two minutes too long), "has nothing to do with all this pauperising that you speak of. I fail to see the connexion . . . Thanks, you needn't explain. Good-night."

"The connexion," said the tax-collector, turning on his heel with a laugh, "is simple. The Crevequers persuade every voter they give their—their *charity* to, to vote Conservative. They've undertaken to help Mr. Bunter, you see. That's all. Good-night."

Benjie, left alone in the wonderful evening, sat on his camp-stool on marshy turf and ate his supper. The pot had meat in it, and broth, and puff-balls, and plaintain leaves, and a lot of other things that Benjie believed to be edible. Anyhow he ate them. In the country a man need never starve, Benjie used to say. One can always fry grass, at the worst.

Benjie to-night hardly noticed the various ingredients of his meal, which usually interested him greatly. He was feeling angry and sick and ashamed. Sick of a distempered world, and ashamed that anyone could say his father was a wily old customer, and angry with the Crevequers, who were ruining the countryside. Benjie didn't believe that that had much to do with the election; it was merely the way they were made. That they did it partly with the childish, friendly, expressed desire to "get Mr. Bunter in" was probably true, if people said so; and that was another black mark against them. But anyhow there was enough to their charge;

Benjie had discovered that on his crusades in Suffolk. Indiscriminate giving, limitless, reckless hospitality, wanton encouragement of idlers—all that the self-respecting man, as typified in Benjie, most deplores.

The evening came down on the marshes, and dropped dim green veils over sky and sea. The tide was coming in, drawn by little creeping waves that shivered and broke on smooth wet sands where the first stars glimmered. Benjie washed his pot and plate and cup and spoon in a starry rock chalice, and then went wading along the sea's edge, bare-limbed to knee and elbow, and the tide splashed up against him, and the dusky evening enfolded him. Then the moon swung up like a golden orange over the dim waters, and the dusk was flooded with glory, and from Benjie to the moon a bright road ran.

Benjie, climbing over a jut of weedy rocks that broke the sea's curving line, came into a cove, and a hundred yards from him there waded knee-deep figures—three of them—sailing a large toy boat at the end of a string.

Benjie stood for a moment to watch ; he too was interested in toy boats, and would have loved to have one to sail. But, though he knew that if he had been seen he would have been urgently bidden to " C-come and help," he came no nearer. One can't sail boats under the moon with people of whom one has no opinion. Benjie cynically noted that the third figure was his younger brother's.

He climbed again over the slimy jut of rocks, and splashed back along the tide's edge to where his dying fire above the sea road flickered like a beacon beside the dark van, his beloved home and workshop. He climbed up to it, and settled down to his work ; he was making an ash-wood table.

He was getting to love this wandering life of his. On the whole, he thought Louie had been right in insisting that they should conduct their lives apart. Louie didn't love a wandering life. She was safely settled in Wattles with her people—happier, no doubt, than she could ever have been with Benjie. Benjie went to see her sometimes, and her decision was always the same. " No, Ben, we're best apart. You're one class, as it were, and I'm another, and we'll never get beyond that. If you'd been born what you like to pretend you are, that would have been different—but you weren't, and that's all about it, and I can't bring myself to forget the difference, even if you could."

This intrusion of the class question was, of course, trying, hardly delicate, horribly retrograde. Benjie had hoped that Louie had got beyond that, and had learnt to measure class by his own standard—that of work. But she hadn't, partly through her own fault, partly through his and his family's, and there it remained. And Benjie had come to believe it to be for the best. He could, he thought, do better work unattached, unrooted. People should marry, of course ; but perhaps not all people. And if people, having married, found they had been

ill-judged in so doing, they should accept the discovery like reasonable beings, face it, and undo the tangle in a reasonable way, as he and Louie had done.

The night waves whispered below the sea road, creeping higher. About midnight came footsteps on the road, and voices talking, the one soft, tranquil, leisurely, the other mournfully stammering. The one said, "They'd probably rather stay down here, whoever they are. It looks comfortable." The other, "But we c-can't leave them so near without asking them in. Besides, they may be nice to know. Van people usually are. Gipsies, probably. Perhaps they'll come to breakfast, anyhow . . . Oh, good evening."

"But it's Benjie's old cart," said Jerry, without surprise, as usual. "I didn't know he was about here. *He* won't come in, you know."

Benjie, silhouetted against the lantern-lit interior, looked out at them through his open door, and let his plane rest.

"Good evening. Hullo, Jerry. Do you want to come and sleep here?"

"No, thank you. I'm sleeping at Merrilies End. Why do you work so late? Do you want more books? How long are you staying round here?"

Tommy Crevequer came up to the lit door and said, "I w-wish you'd come and stay with us. Won't you?"

Benjie regarded him gravely.

"Thank you, I'm afraid I can't."

"Well, come to breakfast to-morrow. At—at breakfast time, you know."

"Thank you," said Benjie. "But I shall be starting off early to-morrow—before breakfast time."

"But come as early as you like. Come now; come at six—five—half-past three—any time."

"Thank you very much. I am sorry, but I am too busy."

Tommy said no more. The lantern-light, gleaming on his face, showed it a little puzzled, like a child's who would not like to think he has been snubbed, but isn't quite sure.

"I'm sorry," he said after a moment. "Well, c-come and see us any time you can. . . . I must go back now, I think, to Betty."

"I'll come soon," said Jerry, and lay down on the turf by the red embers and stared at the big moon.

"Why are you so stupid, Benjie?" he enquired presently.

Benjie, also lying by the embers, returned, "Why should I go and stay with people when I don't want to? What do you suppose my cart is for, if I prefer a house?"

"I didn't want you to come to the house," said Jerry. "I knew you wouldn't, of course. It's your manner I meant."

"Why should I pretend to like people when I don't?"

"But it's stupid of you not to like them. They've given me a white guinea-pig with black spots. They're nice."

"Well, you see," said Benjie, "I don't consider that they are. They're behaving very stupidly, and spoiling the whole neighbourhood—besides bringing discredit on father by bribery and corruption. You may ignore all that if you like and take guinea-pigs; I can't. They offered me one; but they're not the kind of people I want to have anything to do with. I don't think they have any claim to exist."

Jerry said, "Oh, well, probably not," sleepily, and added presently, "Even their garden-party was nice, and beautifully disreputable. And you hurt Tommy's feelings just now. I'm going back to them now, to make up for your rudeness." He sat up, and breathed in the sighing sea winds.

"Cecil wants to come and travel in the cart, too," he said.

"Stupid of her. She wouldn't be let."

"No, I suppose not. That's partly why she wants to come. I think her idea is to join you for a bit on her way back to Cambridge, and not mention it till afterwards. Shall I tell her you're about here? Do you want her, or would she be in the way? She's keen to help with your job, you know; thinks she can be more use with women than you, and make them want tables and votes and things. Cecil's extraordinarily energetic."

"Well, I don't think she'd better come," said Benjie, having considered. "It's the sort of thing people who aren't quite sane don't like. And rows are rather boring."

"Oh, I don't think Cecil minds them. . . . Shall

you be gone in the morning when I come and bathe ? Which way are you going on ? "

" South, along the shore. The Aldenham road. . . . You can tell Cecil, if ever she wants to communicate with me, to ask Louie where I am. I send her picture postcards. Good-night."

CHAPTER X

THE CONSCIENTIOUS BOHEMIAN

ONE understands that it is rather *outré* to travel alone with a cousin of the opposite sex in a van, even with the most fraternal feelings. Whoever lays down the law on these and similar principles of conduct would appear to have laid that one quite firmly. Of course the sensible plan is tranquilly to ignore the law, if one wishes to do so; the best people always do that with laws. Cecil Bunter thought she was doing that. As a matter of fact she wasn't ignoring it at all, but taking it very much into account, and defying it because it was a law, and she wished to be the sort of person who ignores foolish laws. Of course one can't be that by thinking about it; thinking puts an end to ignoring, and introduces conscious defiance. Cecil was a Bohemian, like most other things, on principle; she would take off her hat in the road less because she was tired of it than because she wanted to be the sort of person who walks without a hat; she would call on undergraduates in their rooms as much

because it was the improper thing to do as because she wanted to see them. Plenty of people are rather like that at twenty; there is hope for them then, though if they haven't purified themselves of the taint ten years later, they are probably lost eternally.

Anyhow, Cecil, having discovered where Benjie was from Louie (he had just sent Louie a picture postcard of Hollesley market-place) joined him at the end of September, maintaining some reserve on the subject of her plans towards her aunt Lettice (an easy job, that; one couldn't anyhow say much to Lady Lettice, because there wasn't room). As a matter of fact it was quite simple; Cecil went to stay with a friend, and the length of her visit was indefinite. It was a short one, as it happened; it would be more fun with Benjie in the cart, and more useful too. One must keep stirring, and not let the time slip by without striking blows for the Idea. The Idea was still the Beautifying of the Home, with a little Fabianism thrown in.

Benjie didn't mind Cecil coming, if she wanted to. He had a genuine contempt for social conventions himself, and knew that she had. It was probably a good plan for sensible people like them to set an example of freedom. Besides, Cecil and he were practically brother and sister.

He mentioned on his postcards to Louie that Cecil was with him; that would interest her, as she had always admired Miss Cecil for her cleverness.

Cecil really was rather clever: she could cook quite nicely, and in a cart one can afford to do cooking and washing-up without being thought domestic.

She said, "If I did this sort of thing anywhere else, I should get called a nice, sensible, housewifely girl. I shouldn't dare."

Benjie didn't see that. "A good thing to be, I should have thought. I like to be a nice sensible housewifely man. I am, you know. I always do my own chores."

Cecil said a man could afford to; no one was trying to press men back into the kitchen.

Benjie said kitchens were all right, and very interesting. Cecil didn't think they were, and that was all about it. But it was quite fun cooking puff-balls and potatoes in the tripod pot. They ate them in the van, because the late September evenings were growing chilly. As they ate, they discussed their programme for next day. Cecil was to tackle the women of Ottley about some reproductions of drawings that Benjie had bought and was trying to sell for a song. Votes might be allowed to edge in somewhere if convenient, but one must go warily, because of course them suffrage ladies, poor things, aren't quite right in the head, and who shall regard them? Benjie meanwhile was to do some orating in the market-place and show chairs.

"Awfully nice, Benjie," said Cecil of the chairs. "Of course no one will want them."

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That annoyed Benjie ; Cecil was always showing that she wasn't at heart a demorcat, but only in mind. The scornful aristocrat in her was always jumping out.

" If you think in that way about people," he said, " I can't think how you can work among them at all. It must seem so unprofitable."

" I don't think in that way," said Cecil truly. She only felt in that way, and didn't know that she did even that. She didn't like Benjie to be ruffled with her, and said, cross in her turn, " You can only tell by experience what people will like. Yours seems to have been rather one-sided so far."

Benjie said nothing, thinking she was ungenerous, and that it was a pity she had come. But the next moment she said, " I'm a beast, Benjie. I'm sorry I said that. Of course it's only a question of time and patience. I expect they'll be clamouring for the chairs to-morrow."

" Or next year, or ten years hence," said Benjie. " I don't particularly mind when. Things must take time of course."

They had finished supper now, and were sitting in the van's open doorway, with dangling legs, watching the big moon rise behind a squat church tower. Cecil thought it was ripping to be there with Benjie, and that the night was glorious. She was half consciously groping after the *mot juste* for the moonlit hazy night, without which she would prefer not to allude to it at all. Cecil was like that. It is yet another disease of the early twenties.

Benjie said, " What a nice night." He often said the obvious thing; he was quite a stupid boy in some ways, Cecil knew.

Nine o'clock tolled from the squat tower.

" I suppose it's slack of us not to be washing up," said Cecil.

" I will," said Benjie. " I expect you'd better go up to the inn about now. They probably object to late hours, and we've got to make a good impression on the village." Cecil was going to sleep at the inn. It was rather dull, but more correct.

The Marle tax-collector, who was staying with his aunt near Ottley, happened to pass by the van at this moment on his way to a whist-drive (he would be late for it, of course). He saw them, and put up his eyebrows, and said " Good-night."

Cecil said " Oh, what are *you* here for ? " but he didn't stop at all. " He's rather fun," Cecil told Benjie. " Awfully crude and obvious, but interesting. And really a good man, and might help us." (They meant a Socialist by a good man.) " But he seemed grumpy to-night. Oh, I expect he's shocked—thinks us odd, you know." That was on the whole a matter for self-congratulation. It is comparatively dull being rather shocking if no one is shocked.

" Cheek if he does," said Benjie. " He's no right to think about us at all. Besides, we're not odd . . . Come on, I'll come up with you to the inn."

The next morning the van took up a central position in Church Street, and Benjie and Cecil did

some house to house visiting. Cecil showed some reproductions of John drawings to the ladies of the houses.

" Aren't they good ? " she said, confiding in the sympathy of a lady who was ironing clothes (it was a Tuesday). " Look at the lines of that woman's dress . . . do you see ? "

The lady, who privately thought her Sidney did things better than that at his drawing-class, said, " Fancy that, now."

" We're letting them go for sixpence each," Cecil explained, " because we want people to have them."

That, of course, is usually the reason why things are let to go cheap. Besides, was it cheap ? The lady wasn't sure.

" I won't trouble you, miss," she said. "We've lots of pictures, look." They had. There was His Majesty King Edward the Seventh, with a number of his relatives, and several beautiful pictures from Christmas numbers, and numerous photographs of the family.

Cecil said, " Don't you see the difference ? Don't you *want* to have good things ? I wish you'd begin and try and care about it . . . Do."

It was a pity Cecil was rude, like that. She really wasn't cut out for a propagandist, who should have tact.

The lady said, " Thank you, I won't trouble you . . . I must get on with my ironing, if you'll excuse me."

Cecil sighed and went. It was a pity it was

ironing morning. John drawings hadn't a fair chance. But she sold a few. It is marvellous what you can sell if you try, and aren't daunted by ironing. Ironing may even be a help, as one must get rid of intruders at all costs, even sixpence and a queer picture.

She had most luck at a dress-maker's. For the dress-maker, herself not interested (or rather, not given a chance to show herself so), had a nephew staying with her. The nephew was sitting in the parlour, reading the *Morning Leader*. He saw her coming, before she knocked.

" A cool one," he reflected. " Perhaps she wants to square me. I bet no one knows of this little adventure of hers."

He opened the door to her. She said, " Oh, how do you do? Are you staying here? I'm selling pictures. Will you look at them? "

He looked at her instead, while she spread them on his aunt's table, by his aunt's Bible. Rather *bornè* of his aunt to have a Bible lying on her parlour table, as if it were something one set store by, not just a set of interesting old fables, as he and Miss Bunter, and even the enlightened Congregationalist minister at Marle, knew it to be. He hoped Miss Bunter wouldn't think he had part or lot in that Bible.

He supposed the drawings were clever, if she said so. She was intelligent, if immoral. But he wasn't much interested. She expounded to him the Idea, because he would understand.

" To educate people's taste . . . give them good

things to look at . . . real Art, not trash . . . I've left some at people's houses for them to look at all day ; it takes time to see how good they are. I shall call again in the evening and see if they'll keep them."

" Ah, on appro.," said Mr. Hancock. " That's sound business. . . . Well, I'll take some, by all means." He wished to show her that he too was a person of taste. Though he disapproved of her he rather admired her style ; it was *recherché* and out of the common way, and she was too good for that stuck-up cousin of hers who had deserted his wife. But he meant to show her what he thought of her goings-on ; his manner had what books describe as a scarcely-veiled insolence.

He bought six pictures. " It's not a bit of use your seeing my aunt," he said. " She's busy, and she wouldn't admire these clever drawings either, dear old soul. That's what she likes." He indicated the pictures on the walls. " A trial, aren't they? It isn't a bit of use, Miss Bunter, your trying to raise the taste of the masses in Art. It needs a bigger haul up than *you* can give it."

Cecil argued about that for a bit. When she had done she found that he was looking at her rather queerly. She paused for him to answer her arguments.

" People are rather particular in Ottley," was the way he answered her. " Do you find you're well received, if I may ask ? "

" Well received ? Oh, people always like a talk, I

think." Cecil didn't think the tax-collector's manner had improved since last she met him.

"Ah. Possibly they aren't aware yet of your circumstances. I have purposely not mentioned them, not even to my aunt, not wanting to make mischief or spread scandal. But things leak out, Miss Bunter."

Cecil disliked his tone very much. It was certainly insolent. She objected to the expression of his eyes. They were insulting, and he was being vulgar. It is one thing to shock the respectable as they loom in a vague, indeterminate background, and quite another to be confronted with one of them in person. To shock people is to give them rights; rights to be vulgar, or indecent, or angry, or terrible in some other way. Cecil shook a little as she collected her drawings. She paused a moment at the door to compose herself, before saying, (and her voice had a little tremor of anger in it,) "There is nothing that I could in the least object to your mentioning about me. I am sorry I don't in the least understand you . . . Yes, I do. I imagine what you mean is that you think it queer of me to be travelling about like this, and that other people will think so too; and be shocked. I daresay you're right. People who are vulgar enough not to appreciate good art are usually vulgar enough to be shocked. You can't suppose that I should have the least objection to their being shocked—or you either. Good-morning."

On thinking it over afterwards Cecil was not

satisfied with that speech. She should have more definitely laid down her principles—flung them in his face. But at the time it seemed not possible to lay down any principle or raise any discussion. Principles crumpled up when one was being looked at like that.

" Middle-class vulgarity jumped out at me like a wild beast," she wrote in a letter to a college friend. (College friends, being sympathetic, are told things ; they are not shocked ; they are intelligent and on the right side, not like people at home ; everyone knows that.) " It was rather ugly . . . More and more one feels the Middle Classes are an unexplored territory—the funny standards they have, the odd, upside down ways of judging things, the wax flowers on the chimney-piece and the Bible on the table—and standing among them a vulgar, shocked creature with a dreadful smile . . . There must be some way of putting this to rights. The Poor are easier ; one understands them. They haven't got that dreadful respectability—or when thay have it's only a thin wall they've built round them to defend them ; it doesn't go through and through, as with the M.C. . . . I didn't do any more that day till the evening ; I wanted Benjie horribly, so I stayed by him while he talked to people. Benjie is a good antidote after a dose of M.C. He is so splendidly sane. I suppose that's what's wrong. The M.C. aren't sane—not essential, not free from cant. How queer it must be to be of them, born and brought up among them. What would one be, I wonder ? People like you and

me and Benjie, I mean. I suppose we should break out and go to the bad, as they call it, and fall into the abyss. Well, I'd rather be in the abyss than up on the levels with them . . ." A page more of this, leading on to . . . "There are white nights of moony haze, and the villages are glorified into a magic mystery, and cant and vulgarity and middle-classdom fall away. Even the church tower stops being a symbol of repression and stupid insincerity, and becomes a centre of graciousness and romance, dark and square against silver moonlight. I could almost agree then with my Socialist parson cousin, Bob Traherne, who says that the Church should be the centre of social life. But one knows that is fundamentally impossible really: we've travelled too far for that, and couldn't get back even if we wanted to. Only I do feel, if any form of religion, it must be the Church; it is so awfully picturesque. Some people are Enlightened Congregationalists. That seems to me appalling. To be a Congregationalist is ugly, and to be enlightened is worse. Because they aren't enlightened, really; they are still respectable and shocked. They only think they're enlightened: like Mrs. Venables. The Church doesn't think so: it doesn't pretend, and it's got the splendid historical side at its back"—(that wasn't good: Cecil crossed out "at its back.") "But by daylight one knows one can't traffic with any of the Churches—they are all enemies really. My cousin Bob sends me the *Church Socialist Quarterly*. I believe they think they can capture the Movement.

Of course that's rubbish ; they can't do more than hamper it a little. Socialism must include so much that the Church could never allow. The Church stands up for respectability. So the Church is not for me. Oh, I'm *glad* I'm not respectable, aren't you ? What an awful thing to be. If one were, no van, no puff-balls stewed in the pot beneath the white moon, no nothing . . . Term begins on the 11th, doesn't it ? I've got a few books with me, and am working a little, in spare moments. There aren't many, what with the Campaign, and cooking, and washing up. Benjie is jolly good at domestic things—better than I am, but then he's had more practice. Besides, he can afford to be domestic ; no one is trying to press men back into the kitchen." (Pity to waste one's rather good remarks by only making them to one person.) " It's all being frightfully jolly : I don't feel I can ever settle down beneath a roof again. When I come up I can tell you lots more about it, that I can't write. You see, it's an entirely new experience for me, and I don't feel I've altogether caught on to all of it yet—there's so much. Benjie himself is a rather big person to be with—he is so awfully selfless, and eaten up by ideas. And at the same time so funny and simple, and awfully clever with his brain and hands, but not specially in his talk ; in fact at times he's fairly crude, and I feel *years* older. And he's so busy planning things and thinking them out that he doesn't quite always listen to what I say—but one doesn't want to be listened to, as long as one can

express oneself for one's own edification . . ." And so on ; quite a lot more. Probably the friend read it all. She was twenty-one. She admired Cecil a good deal, and quite held with her views on Church and State, and Life and Art ; but she smiled at the last remark quoted, which was very like Cecil indeed, and not true.

Ten days later they met at college. Cecil was very thin and brown ; the effect of puff-balls and the sun. They had cocoa and cakes at ten o'clock in Cecil's room, several of them, but Cecil didn't mention the van till the others had gone. Till then they talked about people, and games, and work, and holidays, and all the things one always does talk about on the first night of term. But from 10.30 onwards, Audrey (Cecil's friend) heard a great deal about the van. It was obvious that it was the one thing that was really interesting. Audrey was rather a nice girl—clever and sensible, and fairly level-headed, and, in her more reticent and tranquil way, as keen as Cecil on the things Cecil was keen on. She would certainly think it quite silly not to travel in a van with anyone you like. College friendships are good things ; there are perhaps no others quite like them ; they touch the essentials of being—aren't satisfied, indeed, with less. For if a person doesn't see eye to eye with you in a few of the most important things, why make friends ? There are others all round who do. It is not as in later life, when environment and accident must enforce personal relations.

Cecil to-night was in a mood of radiant exaltation, triumphantly content, with the touch of the sun and the feel of the clean winds still on her face. She didn't put her cups and plates outside the door to be washed, but remembered that it is rather rotten not to wash up one's own things and she was going to do that in future. But before doing so she took off her dress and sat among the cushions by the fire, and began to brush her hair and talk. Audrey lay back in a big chair and listened. She was amused by Cecil in this radiant, conquering mood.

"It's the only right life," said Cecil. "Why do we ever lead any other? We're going to do it again. Benjie's such a ripping person to be with. One *can't* not feel keen and hopeful when one's with him. Some day I want you to come, old thing. You and Benjie would get on. In a way you're rather alike. I'm not; I fizz and explode . . . D'you know, I feel I've learnt a bit of the Secret." (The Secret of the universe, she meant, of course; that is another thing about college friends, they know what you mean—possibly because you have rather often said it before, and so have they.) "Like when you have gas, you know; you learn the Secret then, but you forget it when you come round. I've learnt it differently now, and I shan't forget. It's just big spaces and clean winds, and the sun and the mist, and more than that . . ."

The friend sleepily quoted one of the more hackneyed lines of Meredith's poems. "That's an old story, surely."

"Of course it is. As old as the hills. That doesn't matter; I've learnt it new. I thought I'd learnt it before, but I hadn't. You have to *go there* first. Audrey, I feel as if I'd been at the back of the North Wind. Diamond learnt the Secret, and I have too. After that, what else can matter? Little things simply don't count; how can they? Triposes —hockey—people—everything—they're like the outside dream revolving round the real thing. D'you see?"

"No," said Audrey.

"Why not, stupid?"

"Because the secret of the world ought to make the whole world more real, not less. D'you see?"

"No, of course I don't. I don't agree. It doesn't make all the little funny accidents more real—it just puts them in their place, in the shadow-border. It all becomes a Unity—see? I could write an article for the *Monist* about it."

"Does it really help to clear things up—link them together?" Audrey wondered.

"Course it does." Cecil yawned a little, tired, though not of her own profundity, and ate a mixed biscuit with sugar on the top.

"Audrey, old dear."

"M-m . . . Give me a biscuit."

"Catch, then . . . I say, how awfully new the term is."

"Not really very. It's ten minutes past eleven."

"Eight whole weeks. What a lot! I want the holidays. I do. I'm not interested in the term."

Audrey lifted her brows very high. "Fancy!" Then she became grave suddenly. "You're being a stupid baby, you and your secret and your shadow-border. I suppose *I'm* in your shadow-border, am I? Cheek, putting me there. We're not a shadow-border, any of us. Everything's frightfully real—hockey and Fabian meetings, and work, and even Trips—though you can put those in any border you like, for me. Pull yourself together, my child, and don't let your nice holiday spoil you for daily task . . . *Cecil,* that hurt." Mixed biscuits, flung with force, do hurt.

"Now I'm going to bed," said Audrey. "And don't let your mind grow narrow, my dear."

"'Tisn't narrow. Only the van is big, and fills it up . . . I say, Audrey."

"What now?"

"Will you come with me one day to Wattles and see Louie?"

"Very well. Would Louie like it?"

"Course she would. And I want to tell her all about the van. I do want to keep up with Louie. At present, you see, it's been a bit of a failure, and things can't stop at that. I want to help her to understand it all—herself and Benjie, and how they can be friends in spite of everything. Louie, you know, interests me enormously. It was so surprising the way she seemed suddenly to wake up and grasp the situation."

"I don't know why surprising. She would have been a fool not to, rather."

"Oh, *we* should, of course. But she's different, you don't expect people like that to see things, quite."

"You shouldn't draw lines, Cecil. You're being a snob."

"I'm not. I never draw lines. But—oh, you know education does make a difference. And so I want to help her to see more and more, now that she's seen so much. She's seen quite wonderfully much already."

"I see. You're tackling the problem *à la* Henry James. His people always sit up so late at night elucidating each other, don't they? It seems to be a complaint of midnight . . . What do you want to help her to see, exactly?"

Cecil's arm described a parabola. "Everything. Herself. Benjie. Me. The situation. How to take a little and leave the rest, and be happy and great . . . In fact, the Secret."

"Oh! I see. Funny young one. Good-night."

Some of Cecil's friends spoilt her. Others sat upon her. Audrey Travers did now one now the other.

The first time Cecil went over to Wattles she went alone. She found Louie being domestic (peeling potatoes). Mrs. Robinson informed Cecil, whom she greeted without ardour, that Louie was "behind," and busy. "And, if you'll excuse me, I don't know as I want her disturbed."

Mrs. Robinson had hostile, faded eyes, in a weak face. Cecil supposed that the Robinsons were angry

with Benjie, with the bad logic of the uneducated. What mists of misunderstanding there probably were to clear away ! Oh, to give them the clarity of perfect truth which admits of no anger. Sorry one may be for life and its clash of incompatibilities—but angry, no. One accepts.

" She won't mind seeing me," said Cecil. " I'll go through, shall I ? " A rhetorical question, delivered as she passed through the back door.

There, in the little yard, stood Louie, peeling potatoes. When Cecil spoke to her she cut her thumb. The sudden colour rushed into her face and ebbed, and she put her thumb in her mouth. So they did not shake hands.

Cecil said, " You don't *mind* my coming, Louie ? "

Louie wrapped her thumb in her handkerchief. Cecil looked away. The handkerchiefs of the poor. . . .

When the handkerchief was tied, Louie said, answering, " Mind ? . . . Well, that do seem a bit queer."

She was just as of old, patient, reticent, brief of word ; thinking what ? Cecil's thoughts bubbled out ; Louie's didn't ; there was the difference.

" You've just got not to mind," said Cecil. " Because I want to see you—to go on seeing you. I think we can help each other, d'you know."

Louie peeled potatoes, painfully ; seeming in silence and without comment to accept the fact that Miss Cecil thought that.

"You know I've been travelling with Benjie lately, helping him with his work?" Cecil said.

Of course Louie knew that. Benjie had told her, on postcards. Others also had told her. Louie had heard it many times; she was a little tired of hearing it, perhaps.

"Yes. Yes, I heard that, Miss Cecil."

"Oh, don't call me Miss. Why will you? Can't we forget those stupid things, and be friends?"

Louie made no answer to that. Probably they could not; possibly one of them did not wish to. Again one came up against that unrevealing inexpressiveness of Louie's as against a blank wall. Cecil pulled herself together, remembered that she was grown up, and years older in everything that mattered than this wordless child of the poor. One had to tell oneself that from time to time with Louie, lest one should forget it.

"You haven't written to Benjie lately," said Cecil, for that was partly what she had come to say. "Why haven't you?"

"Excuse me, Miss Cecil—your skirt's blowing into the trough. That'll get messed."

Cecil moved away from the trough.

"Why haven't you, Louie? Benjie minded. So did I."

"I'm sure you're very good," Louie murmured, which was no answer, and Cecil laid a hand on her arm.

"Don't be stupid, Louie. Don't peel potatoes; it'll hurt your thumb . . . Now tell me, *why* did

you stop writing to Benjie directly I wrote to you for his address? You haven't sent a word since, and we've both been unhappy about it. Now *don't* say it was good of us, because you know that's stupid of you. Do you know *why* it's made us unhappy? "

Louie took up another potato, and apparently did not know. So Cecil told her.

" Chiefly because it shows that you don't understand. That your point of view about things is wrong. That you think one friendship, one companionship, is hurt by another. As if anything external like that could hurt a friendship. As if life wasn't big enough to hold dozens of friendships for all of us, one making another richer. Louie, don't you see? Don't you see how wrong it is to look at life like a dance, in which one partner supersedes—pushes out—another? I believe that's what you have been doing. But that's not the civilised point of view."

Of course if it had been it couldn't have been Louie's, who was not civilised. Louie's head ached a little. She remembered the London days, how Miss Cecil would talk and talk, and explain and explain, and turn everything upside down, and all the time one knew so well, and words made nothing clearer. How the Rich did love words! They exalted them; made them fulfil too high an office. The Poor, too, love words; but they keep them in their proper, lowly place, to describe things concrete, physical, external. The Rich think to use them to elucidate emotions

and ideas, and the facts of the spirit ; so they pour them out and pour them out, and nothing is achieved, and, sublimely independent, the facts of the spirit persist, unaltered and unrevealed.

Cecil still talked. But her talk weakened a little. She said, " 'Tisn't that you bother about conventions —proprieties, and all that stuff, Louie ? I'm sure you don't. You don't think Benjie and I oughtn't to have gone together—I know you don't. You see, we're cousins ; and even if we weren't, that's all nonsense, isn't it ? We knew you'd understand. And we thought you'd feel the same as we did about it."

Louie was wiping her hands on her apron, after the potatoes. She spoke at last, simply.

" You talk, Miss Cecil, as if you was thinking I were angry about Ben and you. I should be a proper fool if I was. Ben and me, we've agreed to let each other go our ways, and there it is. There ain't nothing to be said about it, as I can see. Though I'm sure you meant it kind, to come . . . But you'll excuse me, I must take the taters in. I'm fair busy to-day."

She took up the potato dish, and paused at the door into the house.

" Perhaps you'll not mind stepping round that way." She indicated the garden passage that led to the road. " That'll save you goin' through the house again. Mother's fair busy, and she's sometimes short . . . You won't take it unkind."

Cecil began to speak again.

" I may come and see you sometimes ? I believe—

I do believe—we can be some good to each other . . . I know you think we're all rotters—but we do try not to be ; though I know if I was poor I should think it a fairly feeble sort of trying. But, you see, you can help us. And there may be some things in which we can help you . . . I shall come again, you know. We're not going to clear out of your life just because you've tried to clear out of ours. You can't clear out : one never can, once one's been in. It's *not* all failed ; it's still a splendid opportunity, and we've got to take it. We may make it, in the end, something most awfully fine. Only don't let's be cowards, and lazy, and miss the chance. You see, Louie, don't you ? It's a chance . . . a chance of a fine thing . . . a chance. . . . "

Cecil's speech trailed away. Somehow the situation was upside down ; she wasn't a garrulous child boring a patient, only half attentive elder who wanted to get on with the house work ; that was absurdly the wrong way up for it to be. She was a person who, seeing light, was trying to open the eyes of the half blind.

" I'm sure you're proper kind," was what Louie said, conducting her down the little path to the front. " That's a windy day for riding, isn't it ? Good afternoon, and thank you for coming, I'm sure."

" Good-bye. I shall come again, you know."

Louie, seeing her off, looked a little nervously up and down the road.

Cecil rode away in a curious state of tiredness and

dissatisfaction. No one likes being snubbed, even by the uncivilised; and poor old Louie's queer wordlessness almost made one feel snubbed at times. Poor old Louie had said nothing. There might be several reasons for this. She perhaps had had nothing to say. She perhaps had been thinking too exclusively of the potatoes. She perhaps hadn't understood enough of what Cecil had been saying to answer; probably Cecil should have been simpler, talked slower. Possibly Cecil herself had in her eagerness talked too continuously for the slow Louie to have a chance. Or again, Louie was perhaps hostile, hurt, jealous, even angry—though she hadn't seemed that.

Cecil, herself full of words, couldn't understand the wordless; they had her at their mercy, for she revealed all and learnt nothing.

"Poor people don't put words to the same use as we do," she said to herself. Which was exactly Louie's own conclusion.

But one poor person she was to encounter who did put words to some such use; he might have been a rich person from his way with them. She met him just outside the village, and got off to speak to him. She had always felt an interest in 'Arry, who wrote poetry about the poor man, and money, and such.

He was lounging against a telegraph post, smoking and coughing. His cough had grown very bad during the last year; his chest had sunk in, and his cheeks had hollowed. Cecil held out her hand to him

and said, " How do you do? I've just been to see your sister."

Harry's hands were in his pockets, and he made no motion to take them out, or to move forward from the telegraph post. For a moment he was wordless, like Louie. Cecil just had time to think that she really couldn't bear a second dose of that, when he collected himself and gave her something quite different.

" You have, have you?" he said slowly. " You have, have you ? "

There was something the matter with Harry. He wasn't going to be nice. Cecil stopped wanting to talk to him ; she wanted instead to get on her bicycle and ride off. But she had courage ; she didn't run away, but always saw things through. Perhaps the wordful are like that ; they have so much they want to say ; they feel they can dominate situations, and if they can't they like to understand them. Anyhow they are not weaponless. Those who turn and flee are those who feel that facts are more than talk about facts, and that words will not avail. They are weaponless : so they flee.

Cecil dauntlessly said, " What are you being disagreeable about ? I suppose you blame us for Louie's affairs. That's not fair. Louie is taking her own way. Benjie didn't want her to leave him. But *I* think it was sensible of her. Why can't we all be friends still ? "

Harry coughed and said, " Yes, you talk. You talk and talk, just as you always did to Louie, driving her

fair wild. Among the lot o' you, you've spoilt her life —you and your fine notions and your talk, and havin' her up among you and lookin' at her as if she was a queer wild beast in a cage, and you was findin' out if she ate nuts or not. *I* know. Louie's rare and patient, but she couldn't put up with that. An' you knew she couldn't, and you went on, and you drove her away from her chap between you, makin' her feel she were dirt beneath his feet, and tellin' her the pore was so interestin'. *I* know ; I've heard you at it, you and the likes of you. Pore ! Pore ! Ain't a man a man, then, pore or rich ? Curse that mealy chap that took her and wouldn't play fair with her. I called him friend once, I did ; I thought he were a nice chap and played straight, and did 'is best to better pore men. I thought he meant right by Louie ; I never thought he'd throw 'er off when he was tired of havin' a pore wife—throw 'er off with 'er 'eart broke and leave 'er alone. Mind you, Louie don't say that : Louie says it were all her doin', and she won't have him spoke against. She says he'd 'ave 'er back to-morrow if she'd go. But she won't go. Nor I wouldn't let 'er. I'd see 'er dead first, I would. Let 'er take up with an honest pore man and leave the gentry alone. *Gentry !* Rotten, all of 'em, rotten all through. England won't be fit for honest men to live in till there ain't one o' them gentry left in it. Them with their fair talk and their wantin' to 'elp the pore and their charity. *Charity !* The charity we want out of them is the right to live. Ain't we as good as you, then ? Ain't we men and women,

just the same? Yes, and better. *Gentry!*" He said some more, but it seems too familiar to be worth recording. Harry himself had very often said it before, to larger audiences. He had it all on his tongue, and it streamed out in strident, cough-broken phrases. It was a discourse rather general than particular. But at the end it became particular again. Cecil, pale and worried, and wanting to talk herself, put in, "Oh, of course you're right; that's just what *we* think, you know, lots of us."

Sarcasm deepened. "Oh, that's what *you* think, is it? Oh, I know what *you* think; you think you can have Louie's chap all to yourself now. You and your vans, and your travellin's and sellin's—we know all about that down 'ere. An' you have the cheek to come an' show your face 'ere, an' go an' crow over Louie."

Cecil stammered, "What d'you mean by speaking to me like that? There is nothing to be ashamed of in our travelling and selling. How—how *dare* you be so horrible and rude?" Words were no use; they broke in her hands; she stood helpless before him.

He laughed harshly.

"*Rude . . . rude . . .*" He was then ruder still, and coarser, till his cough intervened. He had talked so much more, so much louder, than was good for him.

Cecil, while he coughed, got on her bicycle and rode towards Cambridge, crying as she rode. She was reduced at last to the wordless, abject shirker

of situations; she was conquered with her own weapons, and, for the time being, had nothing to say. The poor are so dreadful, so fierce, so unjust, so unthinkably coarse. . . .

CHAPTER XI

MISSIONARIES AND METHODS

THERE followed a warm winter, across which autumn seemed never-ceasingly to be reaching hands to spring, and the earth was soft with gentle rain and green with grass. Benjie and his horse and cart were down in the west, in the warmest corner of all. He was assiduously missionising.

And in the early spring there came also to missionise the west, Bob Traherne and his gang of itinerant mission priests—a characteristic enterprise of Bob's, this. One understands that there is an increasingly popular movement on these lines just now. It has romance, which should carry it far.

Benjie, coming to a little Devon fishing village on a mild March afternoon came upon Bob in a shelter on the sea shore, boiling tea and composing a sermon (for it was Saturday).

"You'd better come and sleep in the van," Benjie told him. "It's warm in there; I keep a nice frowst."

"It's warm everywhere," Bob returned. "It's perfect weather. If it wasn't I shouldn't be here. Open-air services in the cold are no catch."

"*Do* you catch them ? " Benjie was curious about it. He didn't.

" Oh, to a certain extent. Holding them's more difficult, of course, and what counts. But one can but fling one's wares among them and be content if a little gets picked up, and less still kept, and least of all paid for."

" I am not content," said Benjie, soberly. He always wondered a little at Bob's undimmed vividness.

Bob returned, " You ! Of course not. . . . Well, have some tea, anyhow."

Benjie had some. It was good China tea, and a pleasant change after his own, which was one-and-sixpence, on principle. Good tea was Bob Traherne's only extravagance. After drinking it and eating a slice of bread and raspberry jam, Benjie felt rather more content.

" Still," he said, " I am not content. And why ' of course not ' ? Do you mean because my wares are bound to be unacceptable, in the nature of things ? "

" Yes," said Bob, with his mouth full.

" Why should you say that ? "

" I'll tell you in a minute. . . . Have some more tea first. Jam ? Oh, there's another pot somewhere. . . . Yes, I'll tell you. In my view, you're leaving out of account the most important force in the world, the keystone of all systems and all life."

" Meaning ? " Benjie feared he meant God, and there they couldn't meet. " Not religion ? "

"Oh, well, religion's a product of it, of course—and that's why religion is bound to succeed where your systems of art and conduct can't. But what I was meaning by the keystone of all life is personality. That's what you're leaving out of account. I'll tell you what you're doing—you're trying to destroy personality. You're trying to enforce on people—on *people*, the genuine, live, sacred article—a system, a set of principles, a soulless code of life and art. You're trying to give them what you think they ought to like, not what they do like. You're despising personality. They like a wax nosegay; you tell them they mustn't. They admire a Christmas Illustrated; you give them a John drawing and tell them to admire that instead. Good Lord, why should they? They're people, like yourself; they know what they like, just as you do. Do you want to turn them into canting hypocrites, or to destroy their personality and kill their taste and admirations and give them nothing in exchange? You can't, you know. Personality's too strong for that. People were made before art, presumably. They'll like what they like as long as they continue to be people at all. . . . Didn't I say all this to you ages ago? I meant to, I'm sure."

"Probably. I forget. If you did I no doubt thought it nonsense. I do still. And look here, you're preaching against yourself, you know, as much as against me. I should like to know what *you* are doing, if not trying to give people what you think they ought to like instead of what they do

like. If that's destroying personality, you're destroying it as hard as you can."

"There," said Bob, with satisfaction, emptying the tea-pot, "we come to the point—the immense difference between Christians and other systematisers. Yes, I grant you the systematising; and if the churches aren't careful it may undo them. But, at their best—oh, and at their worst, of course—they base it all on personality. They don't take away personality and give nothing for it; they aim merely at making gaps through which a greater personality can flow in. See? It's all personal: a system if you like, but a living system. It's not a dead code but a living force. And alive *because* backed by a person; no other reason whatever. There never is any other reason why anything is alive. Of course a believer in any sort of a personal God is bound to know that personality is the source of all life, the keystone of all systems; he at least can't (if he's logical, which he seldom is) make your mistake, of subordinating people to theories. Also, he never need fail. When a secularist's systems break and fail, what has he to fall back on? When a Christian's enterprises fail, as they keep doing, of course, he has the unquenchable source of inspiration and enterprise to fall back on—that is, personality—a Personality greater and more living than his own. That's what he believes, and that's where he scores. My word, I'm sorry for you secularists."

"And yet," mused Benjie, "we work for the same things, you and I. We both want to subordinate

individualism to authority ; we both want a Socialist state. How can you want that, if individuality is everything ? Why aren't you an anti-socialist, an individualist, a Protestant, an anarchist ? "

" Oh, Socialism. You know, your theory of Socialism is really rather *vieux jeu*. How often I say (usually in the *C.S.Q.*, which I regularly send you, by the way) that Socialism is merely a means to the one great end—the setting free of personality. Once you make it a limiting or cramping of character, it's precious little use. It's a useful system, like the Church, but subordinate always. . . . People, people, people—there isn't anything else in heaven or earth. I don't give a farthing dip for any principle whatever which isn't kept in its proper place, well beneath individual human needs. Principles must be adaptable ; all subservient to the one end. . . . You know, if I may say so, you do the most profane things, Benjie. You subordinate people to theories in a way I call rank blasphemy."

" You are thinking of my marriage, I infer."

" That's acute of you. I am. You married a person—a live human soul—a living specimen of the force that animates all the worlds—for the sake of a principle, an idea. My dear man, it was preposterous of you ; so ludicrously the wrong way round that words fail one."

" The supply seems to be lasting out so far," Benjie grunted.

" Well, you can think it cheek, my saying this ; but you can't deny its truth. You can't deny that

it failed, your beautiful plan; went smash, and your two lives with it. That's what occurs when you have the theory on the top and the people underneath; when the theory caves in it crushes the people. Whereas, if you have it the proper way up, people uppermost, the rest nowhere, you're all right."

"I see. The lawless life of individual impulse and desire. In one word, anarchy. I don't think you're doing yourself and you're principles justice; if you are, and if that's what the Church is preaching just now, it is a more harmful and dangerous organisation than I thought."

"The Church," said Bob, "regards the individual soul as more important than any system or anything else in the world. If you call that dangerous, she is dangerous. I admit that she's dangerous to all the dead codes and systems that cumber the world. She's more or less of an explosive, of course. The personal element is always something like dynamite. And dynamite is good for clearing obstructed roads. . . . Oh, you'll see in the end how everything drops away and decays and dies, and only people remain, immortal and unquenchable, the source of all the new life that is to be. . . . How do we know that anything else exists, even now? We don't. We often suspect it doesn't." (Bob had taken the Moral Science Tripos, though he had really quite got over it some years ago, except when he was excited, as now.) "But we know that we exist ourselves" (he had anyhow got over it that far)

" and that other minds exist. You and I and that fisherman wading will be there when there is no more sea. . . . We are there, even though there is no sea now. . . ."

Bob quieted himself over a clay pipe.

Benjie, lying on the sands, listened to the washing of the evening waves, and watched the fisherman walking bare-legged on wet sands. He was a big man in a blue jersey ; from his roll, a sailor not long from the sea ; from his grizzling, curly hair a man of middle age—something under fifty, perhaps. He was coming up from the sea towards them. When he had got half-way, Bob made a sudden movement of recognition, and took out his pipe and stood up with outstretched hand.

" Hullo ; so it's you. I'm frightfully glad to see you ; no idea you weren't somewhere in the China seas."

The big man smiled at him, and his brown, beardless face was like a boy's. He had very blue eyes and a frank, candid, beaming gaze.

" I've quit sailoring, Mr. Traherne, sir. I've a mind to try the land, now I'm getting old. I heard you were here, so I came out to find you, and give you a shake of the hand for old times." His blue glance fell on Benjie, and Bob said, " Benjie, this is a friend of mine, whom I saw last at Savona, when I was in charge of the sailors' club there three years ago."

Benjie and the sailor gripped hands.

" Yiss," the sailor said, in his soft, deep, lilting voice, touched with Devon accent, yet rather of the

sea than of any corner of the land. "There we met, sure. The young parson saved me my ship that day. I'd a nigh lost her, drinkin' in the town. Drunk away all my money, I had. An' I never could pay back what you lent me, parson, though you said I should one day; but the day ain't here yet, times bein' hard."

"Oh, that'll keep, that'll keep. It's good of you to come and see me like this."

The blue beam of the candid eyes pleased Benjie, though the man, it seemed, had no sense of honour. He thought he had better leave the friends alone, but Bob thought not, so he stayed and listened to their conversation.

This, he reflected, was the sort of person who gathered about Bob, who loved persons more than principles. A pleasant friend, no doubt; but probably lacking in fibre, since he got drunk and didn't even desire to pay back what he owed. Benjie, loving principles more than persons, had no use for such as he. Besides, he wore ear-rings, and personal adornments are a symbol of futility.

The sailor's soft talk lilted on pleasantly with the lilting waves; he was telling Bob about many adventures by sea and land. They didn't always redound to his credit; but he had a nice chuckle, and Benjie was interested, having a boy's taste for a story. They had supper together (Benjie thought that the sailor would always have supper with anyone who asked him) and talked on till half-past ten, when Bob said it was bed-time, because he had to

take a service at seven next day. He said to his friend the sailor, "I'll walk home with you. Wait for me, Benjie, will you," and Benjie washed up his supper things for him while he was gone.

When Bob came back (he was gone some time) he asked, "What do you think of him?"

Benjie replied, "Rather a pleasant sort of a scamp. Not the type one has much use for, of course."

"A good companion," said Bob.

"Good company," Benjie amended. "For a companion one wants, I think, a rather more civilised moral code. He's an amiable barbarian. I suppose he will now devote himself to a life of loafing, drinking, and cadging."

"He's worth saving from that," said Bob, thoughtfully. "There's some work ready to your hand, Benjie, if you want to do some reforming."

"That," said Benjie, "seems rather your job than mine."

Bob said, after a pause, "It does seem so, perhaps. . . . By the way, he's coming to see you to-morrow, before you make a move. I told him he'd better come to breakfast with you."

"Good of you. You'd better come too. What does he want to see me for?"

"Likes you, I suppose. Oh, and I fancy he's got something to say, as well. No thanks, I won't come too. . . . Well, good-night. Nice of you to have done the washing up."

The next day, after breakfast with his visitor,

Benjie turned his face to the east. He wanted to speak to his people. Besides, disturbing rumours had come to him, partly through Cecil, who was indignant, partly through Lady Lettice, who wasn't, of the state of Mr. Bunter's constituency. The long-deferred elections were due at last, and now the corrupt practices of Mr. Bunter's friends were to bear fruit. Benjie felt he must be there, to see the worst for himself, and possibly to urge Mr. Bunter to separate himself publicly from the policy of his supporters, lest he should be suspected of the taint. Perhaps, too, he could do a little counter-influencing, something to undermine the insidious influence of Merrilies End and its preposterous charity, something to waken a sense of shame in recipients or givers. But of the givers he had little hope; he believed them to be lost eternally, and wished to have no more traffic with them. His square chin stuck out uncompromisingly as he thought of them. If he could do nothing else in their neighbourhood, he could say some hard things of them, which would no doubt come to their ears. Then they would mind a little, being of that soft kind which likes to please and be liked.

"Get on, Richard," said Benjie, and cracked his whip sharply (not everyone can crack whips, but he could), and drew his coat up over his ears, for St. Wulstan was come, roaring like mad.

So he pushed his way across England, from the warm hills of the West to the blown plains of the East, and passed about St. Cuthbert's day through

Cambridge. There he called on Jerry, and told him the latest news about his own concerns, which Jerry of course received with tranquillity. He didn't, in fact, seem much impressed. Nothing in the sphere of outward happenings did impress or interest Jerry very much.

Then they talked of the corrupt constituency. Jerry, peaceful still, said, "Oh, why worry? Politics are like that, aren't they? Politicians are never honest, I believe, poor things. It's not their fault; it's the horrible party system."

They agreed about the party system being horrible; to Benjie horrible because it was party, to Jerry because it was politics.

"But why should these Crevequers," complained Benjie, "mix themselves up with elections and politics? It's not as if they cared or knew anything about it."

"No," agreed Jerry thankfully; "they don't. But they like to please father and all of us. They'll be extremely disappointed when they find they're not pleasing you. Besides, it's not only the election, or chiefly; they love giving away for it's own sake."

"Again the desire to please," Benjie commented.

"To please themselves too," Jerry added. "It's the only possible way they have of living. Soon, you know, at this rate, their money will be all gone, and then they'll take to the roads, I suppose, and share the cheaper sorts of food with other tramps. They're the sharing sort. You can't blame them

for that, or expect them to change their habits suddenly because you don't approve."

"I like people to have at least the rudiments of common sense and common honesty," Benjie remonstrated.

Jerry regarded him tranquilly. "I know you do. But so many people succeed in being extraordinarily pleasant without them. Don't worry. Stay the night with me."

"No. I'm in a hurry. I shall go through Wattles and see Louie. Do you see her at all?"

"No. Cecil does, I believe. She's made great friends, it seems, with 'Arry. She says she's got to educate him out of something—I forget what. I think she was by way of being rather disgusted with him at one time—he was rude to her, I gather—but she has put that behind her; she says one must, with poor people. So now they're friends. I can't like Cecil's friends as a rule; they're apt to be so very excitable, not to say noisy. Her taste needs toning down. It seems that 'Arry is teaching her the truth about the condition of the poor. From her accounts of their discussions, one would gather that he does it by throwing things at her. However, it seems to make her happy. Oh, and she reads his poetry to me. Repulsive, of course. . . . Must you really go now? You may find Cecil over at Wattles."

Benjie did. She was in the parlour with Harry, reading him the paper she had written for her college debating society, while he punctuated it

with a fire of criticisms, and she made a certain number of corrections to meet them. She knew of course that her literary style was better than his, but he knew more about the subject—at least he knew it practically, she only theoretically, and Cecil had been going in with enthusiasm for the practical realities lately. He called her "Cecil," and "my dear girl." She liked that satisfactory elimination of class snobbery, that Louie could never rise to.

Benjie was glad Cecil and Harry had made friends. He approved of such friendships. Cecil welcomed him with pleasure, and looked nervously at Harry, who made it obvious he wasn't going to shake hands. He had forgiven Cecil for being a lady, because she had insisted on it, and was good at appreciating him, but he hadn't forgiven Benjie for being a gentleman and ruining Louie's life thereby, or for travelling in a van with Cecil. So they didn't shake hands.

Cecil said, "Don't be stupid, Harry."

Harry said, ironically, "Oh, yes. That's stupid, ain't it, not to kow-tow to them as are up in the world. That's stupid not to forget an' forgive, ain't it, when a man 'as a position behind 'im. Comin' 'ere to whistle the girls back to you, are you, lest they forget? You mayn't find them so ready to come when they're called as you think, *sir*."

An insupportable person. Cecil could stand him (at times with an effort) because "the poor" are

like that, and she was taking on the poor unflinchingly just now. Benjie couldn't, because the poor aren't like that, but men and women like himself, and a rude man is a rude man though he have not a penny. So, since Harry was a poor consumptive, intensely to be pitied, he had nothing to say in the parlour, but went through to "the back," to find Louie.

Louie, who was giving scraps to the hen, received him with her gentle, colourless kindness. They then had a long conversation, and discussed the rearrangement of their lives, being as how things were now different like, and Benjie had a plan. There was, of course, Miss Cecil, whom Ben ought to have had, and Ben was fond of Miss Cecil and Miss Cecil of Ben.

"Of course we are; we're cousins," said Benjie; but Louie looked doubtful over that. Miss Cecil was, however, shelved for the moment; there were other pressing topics, and it was all very difficult, and not near so simple as Ben thought. Ben's plans were always so beautifully clear-cut. Was he sure he meant all he said? Sure Louie wouldn't be in the way? Benjie said he was quite sure.

"I must think about it," said Louie. "I dunno as I won't, and I dunno as I will . . ." (she was leaving Ben loopholes, nervously jerking scraps to the hen now replete). "I'll write, Ben. . . . That do seem as if it were meant, some'ow, this happenin' an' all; but I'll write."

"Meant?" said Benjie. "*I* mean it, you know.

You mustn't say meant, Louie. You mustn't believe in a compelling destiny ; that strikes at the roots of all liberty. I mean, you may believe in it —one can't help it, looking at life from one aspect —but you mustn't *think* about it, or you become insane, like a squirrel in a cage."

Louie said, feelingly but absently, " Pore little things. That do seem cruel, don't it. . . . 'Arry and Miss Cecil, Ben, are proper friendly now." She looked a touch troubled over that.

" So I infer," said Benjie.

" That don't seem quite right, do it ? " said Louie; " an' them so different. 'Arry do make free with her ; I don't like to hear the way he go on. I speak to him about it, but he tell me to mind my own business an' 'e'll mind 'is."

Benjie too thought that the best way. Such friendships are exactly what are wanted, of course. They are part of the Idea. He approved of Cecil for doing it : 'Arry wasn't an easy friend to take on.

" Well," said Louie, with a little sigh, " it makes pore 'Arry 'appy ; an' we're sometimes fearin' as 'e ain't got long. 'E can't work now, you know, not more than a little at a time, pore lad. An' 'e an' Miss Cecil, they talk away ; they fair make my head go round ; but there, they like it."

They parted on an indeterminate note. Louie was still puzzled, undecided, uneasy, leaving loop-holes for Benjie. New desire jostled in her patient eyes with old doubts ; hungrily she searched her husband's very young, very honest face. Did he

still not know what love was? Louie, who had feared he might have learnt, believed now that still he did not know. And that being so, what was her course? She passed a rough hand over her aching eyes, and "I'll write," she said.

CHAPTER XII

FAMILY MATTERS

BENJIE said to Lady Lettice and Mr. Bunter at tea, "I am extremely surprised that you should have thought it well to keep me in ignorance all these years of so important a point connected with me as the identity of my parents."

Hugh, who was having tea also, sat up and looked interested. Mr. Bunter looked for assistance to Lady Lettice, found none, and said weakly, "My dear boy, this is most unexpected. Who has been speaking to you?"

Lady Lettice lay back on the sofa and shut her eyes and said faintly, "He's been meeting the man Prittie."

"As you deduce," said Benjie, "I have been meeting my father, who informed me that you had paid him off, so to speak, at my mother's death, and induced him to keep out of the country and hold no communication with me. He has now got tired of being on the sea, and wishes to settle down in this country, and has (very rightly, I think) broken his bargain with you and introduced himself to me. I

met him casually, and Bob Traherne told him who I was. Bob, it seems, has known all about it for some time ; my father told him the story three years ago, at Savona. Bob should, I think, have put me in possession of the facts when he learnt them ; but he says he was told in confidence. You, I presume, had adequate reasons for keeping me in the dark all these years."

Lady Lettice, recovering a little from the shock, said, " Oh, my darling boy, don't use such long words ! Reasons—oh, of course. So obvious, aren't they. If you've met the man Prittie—your father, as you say, yes, of course—one needn't explain, need one. They jump to the eyes, don't they, darling. Your dear mother, you know—so sad, but she *was* so reckless always, dear Sylvia, and she just went off with this sailor person quite quietly. A disreputable scamp, but so good-looking and with a soft tongue, and used to take her out fishing in his boat when we stayed in Devonshire ; that was how it happened ; yes. And then suddenly Sylvia eloped with him. They got married quite quietly and slily, and no one could stop it. And then, you know, within the year your dear mother died, and we agreed with the sailor person that we should take you and bring you up and give him money to keep away from you and never let you know. And now he's gone and told you. How *like* Prittie ! And fancy his meeting Bob and telling him, and Bob saying nothing to me ; how sly of Bob !"

" I understand it was a confidence. And now may

I ask why you did this, please? Why should I have been kept in ignorance of——"

"Oh, darling, don't begin like that again; it's so silly. What don't you understand exactly? Obviously it was pleasanter for you not to know; even you must see that, though you *are* so slow about some things."

"I don't see it. Why was I taken from my father?"

Lady Lettice looked helplessly at Mr. Bunter, who cleared his throat and intervened.

"My dear Benjie, it was obviously better that you should be brought up by your mother's family—by her own sister, in fact. You have always been to us as one of our own."

Benjie acknowledged that. Sore and cross and uncomfortable, he was still affectionate and grateful.

"All the same, I don't see why my father should have been kept away from me with such pains. One ought to know one's father. I think one ought."

The Bunters' silence implied that there are fathers and fathers, and that the man Prittie was one of the second order of fathers.

"I presume that you were actuated by class prej—feeling," said Benjie, being polite.

Lady Lettice admitted it. Mr. Bunter said, being humorous, "We did not know that our nephew was going to grow up such a Socialist. If we had, we might have altered our plan for his upbringing. But, wrongly no doubt, we were of the opinion that it is on the whole better to be a gentle-

man. I know, in these enlightened days, such an opinion is sadly out of date. *Tempora mutantur.*"

"Now Mervyn's beginning," murmured Lady Lettice. "How you two do start one another off! Now try to be reasonable, Benjie. Of course it's nicer to have a proper education and go to Eton and Cambridge, and know nice people, and have a respectable father; isn't it, Hughie? Tell him so."

But Hugh only smiled, and said, "Well, you see, it depends on the point of view. It's just a question of taste, I fancy. Isn't it, Benjie?"

Benjie was irritated with Lady Lettice for saying a thing like that.

"Really, mother, I wish you wouldn't. . . . A *respectable* father; I hate the word. *You* merely mean by it a father of a certain position in society. I don't. I mean a father worthy of respect."

Lady Lettice looked up at the ceiling, and her moment's silence seemed to call her sister Sylvia to testify whether the man Prittie had ever been worthy of respect.

"My dear, a *vagabond!*" she murmured. "A loafer, a—I fear, a drinker. Sailors, you know; so unsteady. And now you say he's left the sea, and he'll be worse than ever. Oh, yes, Benjie, I know he's your father; but I can't call him respectable for that. Did he *strike* you as—as worthy of respect, darling?"

"I scarcely know him," said Benjie, getting stolid.

Mr. Bunter again struck in.

"You must take our word on that head, my dear

boy. Your poor father, I'm sorry to have to say it to you, is *not* a respectable person, I fear, in any use of the word. Your moth—your aunt has described him only too accurately. We have done our best to keep him straight in the past, but it was of little avail. He has, alas, served more than one time in prison. He has levied continuous blackmail—I can't call it by less harsh a name—on us ; and now that he sees a chance of getting profit out of you he has broken his solemn word to us and betrayed our trust. No ; I cannot describe him in favourable terms, I regret to say."

Hugh intervened. " I say, he *is* Benjie's father, you know. Rather rough, isn't it? . . ."

Benjie, who looked unmoved, shot a glance at Hugh's tranquil face. Hugh and Jerry both had a placid way of taking startling information.

" *You* don't seem surprised, particularly," said Benjie.

Hugh said, " Oh, no, I'm not. I've known it for years. I found it out before I went to Eton. I was told not to tell you, you know, or I would have. I quite agree that one ought not to be kept in ignorance of these intimate family circumstances. Later, I've often wanted to tell you, because I knew you'd be so pleased."

" It did seem strange," said Lady Lettice, pensively, " your taking to playing at being a poor man, darling, when all the time . . . It made me quite anxious, because there's *so* much in heredity, everyone says. Now, don't laugh, Hugh ; it's nothing

to laugh at at all. Of course Benjie isn't like his unfortunate father a bit—except a little bit to look at, only Prittie was such a handsome fellow, but the eyes, you know—well, Benjie isn't like him a bit in *character*; you were always such a hard worker, darling, weren't you. and almost *too* severe on people who didn't care for work but just loafed. The idle rich and the idle poor—you never could like any of them, I remember."

"No," said Benjie. "Not particularly."

"Undoubtedly," said Mr. Bunter, "our workers are the fibre of our imperial tree." He made a note of it, to tell his electors.

"So sensible of you, dearest boy," said Lady Lettice. "And your poor father, you know, is *not* fond of work."

Benjie, who had already relegated his father to Class III, those who didn't work though they needed the money, was bored by all this. He quite well knew what sort of a person his father was; of course he didn't care about that sort of person, or approve of it, but one's father was one's father, and Benjie believed in the family.

"In future," he said, "my father and I shall live together. Louie has already consented, or half consented, to join us. We shall return to my forge, and my father and I will work it between us." (Lady Lettice's brows went up, presumably in resignation to one partof the programme and scepticism as to the other.) "I shall also do carpentering work."

A hard-working, steady, well-ordered artisan

household; Benjie's ideal for the English home. Benjie looked pleased with it.

Lady Lettice said, "Oh, that silliness about the forge again. I thought you'd got over that, Benjie. And I thought dear Louie wouldn't live with you again on any account."

"Now that she knows I am of the same class (as you all call it) as herself, and that I am going to settle down with my father, I think she will."

Lady Lettice looked indignant. "Indeed, she's very much mistaken. Class, indeed! What about your mother's class, I should like to ask her?"

"I trust," said Benjie, "that you will do nothing of the sort. And of course one belongs to one's father's—sort of people"—(he evaded the snobbish word). He added after a moment, "I think, do you know, it will be better that Louie shouldn't meet any of you much in future. It upsets her; makes her feel uncomfortable. I know you were awfully kind to her, but you didn't feel she was an equal, and of course she saw it."

"Well, darling, I suppose she would see it." Lady Lettice implied that it would have been very improper of Louie if she hadn't. "But you know how interested we all are in dear Louie. Ida Venables would be quite disappointed not to see her again—watch the development of her soul, you know; Ida is always so interested in that. And I'm sure we all did our best to draw her out, and . . ."

"Louie and I," said Mr. Bunter, "had several most interesting and notable conversations. I

think I was able to open her mind to several new impressions, new aspects of our policy. She learnt from me a considerable amount of constitutional lore, I fancy. She was extremely interested in the Houses of Parliament. I remember I told her a good deal about the working of our Government. She was interested ; I think I may say she saw new light in various directions."

" And all the time," Hugh put in absently, " she wanted to be at the White City."

Benjie said, " I know you were all awfully kind. But—you don't feel her an equal, so it's all not an atom of use."

" Well, dearest, she's *not* that, is she ? So nice and so good and so *interesting*, but—— You see, if she had been an equal you wouldn't have married her, would you, and then we should never have known her, should we. So, you see . . . "

" The situation, being put by you on a certain basis," Hugh murmured, explanatorily, " had to be taken as such by those who subsequently came into contact with it. Perhaps it's no longer on that basis, though ? "

He was in advance of Benjie in perceptiveness and lucidity of thought, so Benjie didn't answer him, but sighed.

" When does the new *ménage* begin ? " Hugh inquired, and Benjie said, " After the elections, I hope."

" You busy with the elections ? You don't take a side, do you ? "

"No. But it's an opportunity for getting people's attention. I speak about the Poor Law and the Minimum Wage, when anyone will listen. I shall also speak, round about here, about the receipt of indiscriminate charity. The whole countryside appears to be rotten with it."

Mr. Bunter said, "Really! That's those young people at Merrilies End. Young scamps. Disgraceful, certainly. Though, mind you, there's something to be said for the old feudal idea—Squire and Lady Bountiful giving largess to the villagers. I always maintain there's something fine in that played-out idea. You'd say, throw it on the dust-heap with the peers of the realm and the monarchy and all the gently-born folk—make a bonfire of all of them, eh? And begin again fresh with a little for everyone and no margin for giving away. Well, well, where does Christian charity come in, at that rate? You must allow a little merit to the stupid old notions, Benjie, after all. Don't pitch into them too severely. After all, those young people have given fresh life and hope to numbers of destitute folk."

Benjie never answered Mr. Bunter's general remarks; he had nothing to say to them; in fact, he seldom listened much; but this last was particular, so he said, "I understand they have been practically supporting numbers of perfectly able-bodied people. I shall certainly say what I think of that. People like the Crevequers are doing their best to throw economic conditions back a hundred

years. And they are starting a sort of Egyptian plague of guinea-pigs over the country."

Lady Lettice murmured, "They do increase so, don't they," soothing him. "But I expect they never thought of that, you know, when they first got a pair; they're very heedless. I expect they never thought about the economic conditions either. They do so enjoy making people happy. They're immensely popular everywhere now."

Benjie had no doubt of that.

"Benjie, dear," Lady Lettice said before he went, "you aren't going to talk about your father to people in general, are you?"

"I have already," said Benjie, "taken my own name. I shall answer any questions I am asked about it. Beyond that, it is no one's business but my own, of course."

"Oh, darling, hadn't you better go on quietly as you were before?" Lady Lettice was agitated. "Is it any *use* raking up the sad old story for everyone to be shocked at?"

Benjie frowned. "Why sad? Why shocked? It's no disgrace to be the son of a sailor. It's no disgrace to marry a sailor. It's no disgrace to adopt a nephew. I don't see what there is for anyone to be shocked at."

"Benjie, you see," Hugh explained, "has achieved the ambition of a lifetime at last. You can't expect him to hide his glory."

Hugh had always elucidated Benjie to his parents, from the time when Benjie was an obstinate infant

who made difficulties, and Hugh a serene little boy who liked things to run pleasantly. Hugh was never puzzled by anyone.

When Benjie had gone, Mr. Bunter said, "We must see what can be done. I must write to Prittie and try to prevail on him to take himself off. This can't be allowed, of course. It would be a scandal. It is a pity Benjie always gets on the high horse and refuses to see reason. As usual, he is running off with a picturesque idea. I wish Benjie were more a man of the world; it is time he began to be; he is no longer a child, and he should put away childish things."

"Do you think, Hughie," Lady Lettice inquired of her son, "that Benjie wants to do this unfortunate person good? Is that his idea? Benjie is always so taken up with notions like that—education and social reform and all that."

"Oh, no doubt he intends to turn his father into a respectable working man; the honest working man, you know, is the salt of the earth. It's to be an ideal household; the hard-working artisan and his industriously assisting parent and housekeeping wife, living in a model cottage, with a bath that the artisan insists on the parent and wife both using daily, and that they insist on keeping the coals in. I don't know Mr. Prittie (I wish I did, he sounds amusing); but I can imagine his attitude towards the proceedings. It will all be a great new interest for Benjie. I don't think you ought to grudge it to him. Benjie is so fresh always; he doesn't seem to

have grown up in the least since his matrimonial experiment failed."

Hugh went away to write to Anne Vickery about it, since it seemed that everyone was to know. He was feeling mildly annoyed with Anne, because she wouldn't marry him, but he always told her things that would amuse her.

Benjie dismissed his model household from his mind till the time should come to think of it. At present the time had come to think of bribery, corruption, the defiance of economic principles, and the ruin of independence, industry, and proper spirit. So he thought of them sadly and talked of them exhaustively, now colloquially in public houses, now oratorically on village greens. He was rather a bore, but he amused himself well over it, and other people didn't listen very much, so on the whole it was a profitable occupation. After all, Benjie always had that answer to give to any challenge as to the desirability of his ploys; they interested at least one person extremely. That may be but a weak argument for educating a parent or experimenting in matrimony (which enterprises probably give more annoyance to others than they are worth in pleasure to the experimenter), but it is a sound one for trying to sell John drawings and self-made settles and for talking in villages about economic corruption, which hurts no one. Of course when he became obviously particular and personal in his references, people began to be rather interested, and to listen and summon one another to hear. Then he

became more particular and personal, till he was positively offensive, considering how many of those listening had probably benefited at one time or another by the system he described as scandalous pauperisation. They thought him offensive. They said, " Pauper yourself," and " Seem as if it was time someone gave *you* something, if it was only a new hat," and other things like that. Benjie said he had a hat which suited him, and he wasn't going to ask anyone for another ; when he wanted a new hat he earned the money and bought one.

" Poor chap, times must have been 'ard lately," they said, deriding him and his hat.

Benjie went on about able-bodied people accepting support and relief till they were really angry.

" Suppose people may accept 'ospitality from them as can afford to give it, without being called to order by folks whose grapes is sour. *I* say Merrilies End 'as been a boon to the neighbourhood, and I don't care who I say it to."

Someone said, " Three cheers for Merrilies End," and they were given. (They were quite close to the Merrilies End gates.) You cheer anything and anybody at election time. You also hiss anything and anybody, and Benjie was hissed. He was also hustled off his feet and jostled to the ground, where he lay unconscious, because the back of his head had struck the pump, and his knee was badly wrenched, probably sprained. First-aiders rushed in, seeing their chance. Before they could do much harm, some people passing in a motor car stopped

to see what was the matter, and having discovered, took the case into their own house, which was quite close. They were frightened about him ; he looked so pale and hurt, and wouldn't become conscious. The doctor, when he came, brought him back to his senses by hurting his knee badly. When he had hurt him a little more, he said he must be put to bed and not moved, and the parish nurse came.

Benjie said, " What about Richard ? " and the nurse said, " There, it's all right ; you keep quiet," till Benjie frowningly collected his words, seeing that she was fool enough not to know who Richard was, and inquired after his horse and van. The nurse then said, " Oh, the van. It's been brought up safely and put away in the stables, I believe."

" Where am I ? " Benjie asked, giddily.

" Why, at Merrilies End, to be sure. You were hurt just outside the gates, you know, and Mr. and Miss Crevequer brought you up in the car."

Benjie said, " Oh, not really—am I ? " and was very sick on the spot.

CHAPTER XIII

THE HOUSE OF THE ENEMY

To have a person ill in your house is a responsibility. You wonder what will do him any good, beyond the doctor and the nurse and the medicine. The Crevequers thought of puppies, soft baby ones in a basket, and brought them up tentatively and put them on a table a little away from Benjie's sofa, where they could not be disturbing. Puppies in a basket are so nice to look at. Benjie looked at them gravely. One must like puppies, even when determined to like nothing in an immoral and revolting world. But if the puppies belong to people you disapprove of, you look gravely at them. The Crevequers perceived this, and thought rabbits might be better, being quieter. So a pair of rabbits came up in a hutch. Benjie begged his hosts not to bother about him ; he said, lying, that he did not care for animals. The question then was, what did he care for ? Books, no doubt ; but he was in no state to read much. "We might read to him," said the Crevequers, and asked the nurse about this. The nurse thought that would be very nice. So they told Benjie what

books there were in the house, and asked him if he liked any of them. Benjie said he didn't; he was lying again, badly, for there were some Jacobses.

"We don't stammer much when we read," said the Crevequers, a little wistfully.

Benjie said, "You are very kind. But I really am quite happy doing nothing at all."

"He doesn't like us," said the Crevequers to each other, downstairs, and their eyes were melancholy at suspicion thus confirmed.

"Economic ruin of the countryside. Political bribery and corruption. The fostering of a p-pauper class. Reckless and undis-discriminating liberality. L-ludicrously disproportionate hospitality. Encouragement of the dregs of our vagrant population. An immoral premium on loafing," they quoted to each other, recalling fragments of Benjie's public orations, to one of which they had listened with extreme interest. Only to one; after that they had thought it more tactful to absent themselves. They had thought it would be so dreadful for Benjie if he saw them there.

"Well," said Betty, with melancholy regret, "obviously he meant it all."

"It's a pity," said Tommy, "when we like him so much. But we won't bother him. We won't make ourselves n-nuisances, Betty. It's so cheap. I feel rather mortified. I would liked to have played my banjo to him, but I won't. Besides, it might make his head ache."

" His mother is coming to amuse him this afternoon, you know. No, his aunt now, isn't she. That *is* nice for him, to have become a common man, isn't it. Just what he would love most. I expect his wife is frightfully pleased too. I wonder if she'd like to come and nurse him ? Let's ask her to stay, Tommy. Let's ask his father, too. And all his family. That would be rather nice, and might amuse him."

The amusement of Benjie weighed on their minds, since puppies, rabbits, books, the banjo, and Crevequer conversation had so signally failed. So Betty sat down to write several notes of invitation.

Lady Lettice motored over that afternoon, however, and said that Mrs. Benjie and the man Prittie had better not be asked to come, as it was most important that Benjie should forget the very absurd plan he had made for a combined household.

" My dears, the *commonest* of men ! And drinks, you know, and idles isn't the word ! It's ridiculous of Benjie to think he can ever improve him, because he can't. He's an unimprovable. And if Benjie went to church and read the psalms, he would know that he must let that alone for ever."

The Crevequers had never thought much about it, but they probably agreed with her and the psalmist. Betty said, " But perhaps he likes his father as he is," and Lady Lettice threw up her hands in negation.

" Oh, my dear, you don't know Benjie in the least if you think that ! He doesn't like people for what

they are, but for what he wants to make them. And of all things in the world he hates loafers and wastrels. So right, isn't he. As my husband says, you know (I daresay you've heard him) our workers are the fibre of our Imperial Tree. Benjie thinks so too, only he'd never put it like that, because the Empire is nothing to him at all, silly boy. But he does hate idlers dreadfully."

The Crevequers knew that, of course. So the man Prittie was not asked to stay ; nor was Louie. Lady Lettice was, but was recommended by the doctor and nurse to make daily visits instead ; it was only half an hour's run in the motor, and, as Lady Lettice observed, of course there was a lot to do at home in election time. (The elections took place about now, by the way, and Mr. Bunter, in company with many other people, got in—a fact which is only recorded here because it put an extra degree of chill into Benjie's attitude towards his hosts, and really it could hardly bear much lowering of temperature.)

"He thinks it's our fault," said the Crevequers to each other. "But it's not. We hardly did any canvassing at all. And we had people to sleep and to meals because they liked it, not because we wanted them to vote Conservative. And I believe he thinks that's as bad, or worse. Why ?" They couldn't understand Benjie ; it was no use trying. Only one thing they understood—that they liked him and he didn't like them. That is really enough comprehension to base a relationship upon. They based it thereon rather mournfully, and kept in the

background, while his friends and relatives kept him company.

When the Easter vacation began, Cecil came. She was thin and eager, with wide bright eyes. For the first time Benjie wondered whether Cecil perhaps lived too hard, too intensely, was too continuously strung up to great purposes. The purpose at the moment was the redemption of Harry. Friendship with Harry was something of a strain, Benjie gathered ; but Cecil was altogether too large-minded and too much in earnest to be daunted by difficulty ; it rather increased her intention. With immense magnanimity she had deliberately put behind her the personal mortification caused by one memorable interview. One must make allowances for the warped vision of the unfortunate. Cecil was really not untrue to her principles, and did so.

" It's like nothing else I've ever had to do with," she told Benjie. " Getting hold of his point of view is so frightfully overwhelming. He's all raw, and hurt, and prickly, because life has used him as a football. . . . I all but chucked the Fabians the other day, because it seems to me one must go so much quicker than that if anything is to be done. But I didn't. I think one's got to keep in and do one's best. . . . I wanted to have Harry to stay, but I wasn't let. Besides, he'd hate it really, all the humbug and fuss. But when next we go in the van, Benjie, couldn't we take him too ? " Then she remembered Benjie's new *ménage*. She approved of that. " It's a perfectly ripping experiment,

Benjie. I'll come and stay with you, shall I? I do wonder if it'll work. Of course the *danger* is that it may get antimacassary and wax-flowery—the respectable home of the honest poor man, you know. But if anyone can keep it out of that, you will. Louie's a dear, and I'm sure she's awfully teachable really. I practise a little judicious shocking from time to time, just to keep her in touch with disreputability. And your father—how funny that sounds!—will help to do that, I expect. He must be rather a lamb, Benjie; I'm awfully keen to meet him. Now you're not going to try and spoil him by turning *him* into an honest working man, are you? Oh, Benjie, don't. We do want the disreputables in the colour-scheme. Not to *use*, you know, but just to look at. Like these darlings here. The mere vagabond, with no aim in life at all, is so awfully picturesque and taking. I believe I could be one myself, quite easily, if I didn't feel what a fearful lot there is to be done. The problem is how to keep them—fit them in—and yet not be hampered by them."

Cecil wrinkled her forehead over it. There were so many problems in her difficult life. There are, if you are responsible for either the fitting in or the extermination of everyone you come across in an over-full world. It was probably this that made her so thin.

When she had gone, Benjie felt rather tired. It came upon him suddenly that talk about plans and ideas and experiments and problems bored him a

little. (Some day, perhaps, thought about them would bore him too, but he had not yet arrived there.) He suddenly felt a desire for puppies and rabbits. But he could not ask for them, because he did not want to be on good terms with their owners. The Crevequers, it seemed, had given him up now as a bad job ; they must have at last got some glimmering of his opinion of them. When last he had seen Betty she had looked a little nervous, and stammered a good deal ; that was just after Mr. Bunter had got in. Benjie didn't really mind Mr. Bunter getting in ; he wasn't a bad-hearted youth, and didn't seriously want his family to be disappointed, and besides, parliament seems the proper place for the Mr. Bunters of this world ; they could hardly do better. Party government seems created especially to "fit them in," as Cecil would have said. But Benjie was angry with the Crevequers, all the same. He wanted desperately to be well and to get away. He wanted his van and the simple life again. He was of those who only breathe with ease in an austere air. Merrilies End was not austere. Its mingling of messiness and riotous extravagance oppressed him heavily ; Dives and Lazarus, each with his characteristic vices, met there in an affectionate embrace, cherishing each other. Benjie, of course, knew that neither Dives nor Lazarus had any right to exist, nor would, in a well-ordered state. They had to be exterminated ; but here each was nourishing the other's pernicious life.

There came a day when Benjie was able to walk

with little pain. So he said he was going. He did not say so to the doctor, who had just told him not to go yet; that is the best way with doctors, not to defy but to ignore. Benjie, like other persons of sense, had long since learnt to manage doctors; so he tied his scanty belongings in a bundle and came down stairs and looked about for the Crevequers. He gathered from Julia, a proud and aloof woman, that her master and mistress might be anywhere in the garden or yard, or out-buildings or down by the sea; they had long since taken their "breakfast rolls" (of the respectable egg-bacon-and-marmalade breakfast the Crevequers knew nothing) with them and gone out after a kitten. That sounded cryptic and vague; the pursuit of a fleeing kitten, or the quest for a new kitten (either seemed equally likely) might lead one almost anywhere. Benjie wandered about for a little, then went to the stables and found Richard and the cart, and joined them together. He thought what a delightful face Richard had; it always struck him freshly after absence.

But there was to be little more of Richard, little more of the cart; in future, only occasional tours could be taken, for Benjie's respectable and hard-working household was going to live in a model cottage. It was stupid of Cecil to talk about being antimacassary and wax-flowery; there is no danger of that in a model cottage; you are so æsthetic therein as to be almost *vieux jeu*, redolent of the tasteful 'nineties. You are surrounded with the joys of art and sanitation, and hand-made furniture, and

fresh whitewash. Benjie had visions of himself and his father and Louie in sandals, having breakfast in the garden before they dispersed to their day's labour, Louie to feed the hen (possibly the pig ; pigs, of course, are delightful animals when nicely kept, and so quiet that they will play with the children), and then to clean the already immaculate house and cook the simple food, and Benjie and his father either to the forge or the workshop ; they would have both going. Then, after a good morning's work, back to the simple mid-day meal (brown bread and lettuce and marmalade for Benjie, and meat for those who liked it) again in the garden. Then they would all go out together somewhere—a country walk, to get flowers for the house. Then tea ; garden again, but round a good table ; none of your finicking cake-stand teas, that none of them liked, neither Benjie, nor Louie, nor the man Prettie. Then work again, anyhow for Benjie. His father, if tired of work (a possible contingency) could smoke a pipe in the garden, for an hour only. But probably he would be tremendously keen on getting on with some job ; Benjie himself could usually hardly drag himself away from his workshop for food and recreation. They would have supper about eight, and then be sociable for the rest of the evening, either alone or with friends. Village life should be a community life, Benjie felt ; they would meet for discussion and debates and conversation, or play billiards at the Institute. Not the public house ; that was a social centre Benjie disapproved of ; he would make it so

pleasant for his father elsewhere that he would not desire that.

They would be a very respectable family; they would raise the working classes in the estimation of all around them; they would show what a good artisan household could be; they would look the whole world in the face for they would owe not any man. They would go to bed at ten, in order to rise up at six and put in two hours' work before breakfast. A good, honest, simple diligent life; a life to be satisfied with. A life very different from the lives led by some people.

However, it is impolite not to say good-bye, so Benjie, having made his preparations for departure, set out again on a search for his host and hostess. He found them this time. They seemed to have either secured or abandoned the kitten, for they were now on the sea-saw at the bottom of the garden. He tracked them by their voices, raised in stammering argument. Considering how much they were two minds with but a single thought, it always surprised Benjie to find how much and how ardently they disputed.

He came up to them and said, "I have been looking for you to say good-bye. I am going. It has been very good of you to take me in like this. I am awfully sorry to have given you so much trouble, Good-bye."

They slid off the sea-saw; they protested. "But you aren't well yet. You can't. You can't walk properly yet. The doctor didn't say you might.

Lady Lettice didn't say you might. You must stay a little longer."

Benjie said, " I am well, thank you very much. I can walk quite well. The doctor knows very little about such things. Lady Lettice knows less. I have a great deal to do, and must set about doing it ; I have wasted so much time already. I must see about my house. I am now going to live in a house with my wife and father, as perhaps you know. Thank you very much, and good-bye."

He held out his hand, and they had to take it in turn. They followed him, helplessly protesting, to the stables, and watched him start. He thought what great melancholy eyes they both had ; eyes, incongruous with the rest of them. Only the melancholy note was also somewhere in their soft, stammering voices, underneath, giving a touch of pathos to the incredibly foolish nonsense they talked.

He whipped up Richard and drove away. At the gate into the road he turned and looked back, and they were still standing there, and it seemed to him that they were, for once, silent.

It was noon at the end of April, and there were violets in the ditches, and green buds on the hedges, and a merry south wind on the road, and orchards blowing pink and white by the way, and cuckoos shouting from every tree, above the rapture of the little birds ; and geese and golden goslings on the green. To exchange Richard and the vagrant life for a model cottage so fast that it cannot be moved, seemed melancholy just then ; but it was for the best.

The craving for motion, for perpetual variety, is unwholesome, Benjie knew. In fact, he had never for a moment yielded to that ; he had fared forth as a pilgrim on a mission, not as a vagrant on the spree. And now his mission led him home again, and wherever it led he followed it, being a faithful missionary. And the family life in the model cottage would be a life worthy of his best endeavours.

He was bound for Wattles now, to prepare his future home. But first he turned north, to pay his family a visit before he departed. He found them having a tennis party. These things will happen, though when one has a lame leg they are an unmitigated bore. However, there is always tea. Benjie sat on a rug in the shade and had some, and talked to those of his relatives who could spare time for him. Cecil spared most. Cecil was rather supercilious about tennis parties, and the people who came to them. She considered them stodgy, and wanted to shock them. People who live in the country are generally admitted by the enlightened to be uninteresting ; it must be the effect of the air. Jerry said, " What does it matter ? They don't hurt us," but Cecil said, " They've no business to be like that," and tried to cure them. She wanted to introduce Harry among them to that end ; Harry was by way of being an explosive, as Bob Traherne said the Church was.

But when Benjie arrived, Cecil stopped trying to startle people, and talked to him. She said, " I'll

come over on Sunday and help to arrange the cottage, shall I? Term begins on Saturday, you know. You've got lots of drawings left over that weren't sold, haven't you? Let me come and help to put them up. Louie will like them sometime, you know, even if she doesn't yet. So will Harry. I've been teaching Harry to like a lot of things."

Lady Lettice murmured, plaintively and abstractedly, to Mrs. Venables, who was calling, "Dear Cecil, she's so interested in that rough young man. If everyone didn't say he was at death's door (yes, so sad, isn't it,) I should really have to interfere. One has to let young people go their own way in these days, but I don't think Cecil realises enough that a young man *is* a young man, even though a bricklayer, and that sort of unfortunate creature is so terribly likely to have ideas above his station."

"Surely," said Mrs. Venables, in her intelligent voice, "one has got a little beyond all that in these days of fellowship and widening outlook. I should say that the experiment will do both Cecil and the young man nothing but good."

"*So* relieved you think so," murmured Lady Lettice. "But you wouldn't say I ought to have him to stay, would you?"

"Why yes, by all means. A most instructive experiment. His sister, poor simple girl, interested me quite enormously, and I have no doubt he would be as interesting a type."

"Oh, my dear, I believe he's a dreadful creature,

from Cecil's accounts. She's absorbed in him, of course, and talks of him day and night, so I feel I know him well. A Socialist, you know. Mervyn can't bear them; he calls them the Red Peril, and says they are a disgrace to their king and flag. Mervyn's such a patriot always. And I feel myself that Socialism should be left to the upper classes. It's a pity in them—look at Benjie and Cecil, and my nephew Bob, and all these young people—but in the poor it's quite insupportable—makes them so ill-mannered, doesn't it. You know, I couldn't have him in the house; the servants wouldn't like it at all, and I've absolutely no reason to think he is even clean."

Mrs. Venables knew of old that Lettice was not really wide-minded, though of a certain specious superficial tolerance, so she did not remonstrate.

Benjie rose to go. Mrs. Venables thought he carried his new status rather well; not defiantly, but with a grave simplicity touched with a little conscious pride of birth. It is a fine thing to become suddenly and without effort what you have been struggling to make yourself for years. If Benjie's head was a little turned by it, as Hugh considered that it was, one cannot greatly blame him.

Hugh and Jerry saw him into his van, and watched him drive off.

"It's a great pity," said Jerry, placidly, as they returned to play tennis, "that he is making this mistake again. One hoped he had done with it and turned over a new leaf. It is bad luck about his

father. He is a nice person ; I liked him very much when I met him ; but he seems to be having the very worst effect on Benjie, and making him more didactic and improving than ever. I don't believe that Benjie will make his father happy, or Louie either."

" His object is to make them refined and good," said Hugh. " Happiness is a minor consideration."

" It's a pity," Jerry repeated. " Mr. Prittie is really quite extraordinarily likeable, I should think, but Benjie and he will probably annoy each other dreadfully. Benjie is being stupid. It was stupid of him to marry, and it is stupider of him to take it up again now, and stupidest of all to think he can make them like baths and pictures and things. What can it matter what other people like ? Shall Miss Egerton and I play you and Cecil a return ? No, I am not going to play with Hilda Wemyss again ; she screams too loud, and told me she heard I was ' doing so well at the 'Varsity.' It was a hideous lie, for one thing, though that of course was its least fault. I'm glad I don't get angry, like Cecil, when people say those things ; it must be so exhausting for her. She and Benjie both take life so hard, don't they ? . . . Seriously, I wish someone would put a stop to that 'Arry business. It's getting a nuisance. I don't think 'Arry has a nice mind, or face. Miss Egerton, will you come and play with me against Cecil and Hugh ? "

Benjie and Richard, ambling back along the road they had come by, were swallowed up in dusk. A

mile from Merrilies End they stopped for the night and supped, and disposed themselves to slumber. It was a black, moonless night. Benjie lay and looked out through his open van door, wide-eyed, hearing Richard munch and chew and sigh.

CHAPTER XIV

ASHES ON THE WINDS

ABOUT midnight the moonless cup of darkness into which Benjie stared was lit by a glare. The glare was of flames, a mile away ; it seemed that there was a bonfire somewhere. The horizon flushed and glowed as if a red dawn was breaking.

" Oh Richard," said Benjie, throwing on his clothes, " we must go and see."

Richard did not particularly want to go and see ; but Benjie must have his way, so Richard let himself be put into his harness and attached to his cart, and once more they took the dark road, and still in front of them the night was cleft by that fiery dawn.

They entered a stirring, clamouring village. Benjie drove Richard into an inn yard, and pushed his way on foot, lamely, up the village street.

" Have they got the engine there ? " he asked, and was told, " Can't get here for hours : there's none nearer than Marle, and that's away for the night at Horsey. The house'll be past praying for, the time the engine comes. Why, it's done for now ; a mass of flame it is, from roof to cellar. They spread rapid, fires do."

All round they were saying, " Ain't that a pity, now. The beautiful house. And so kind as they've always been to everyone ; I'm sure there's a many as'll be sorry . . . Where *are* the lady and gentleman ? It's to be hoped they're safe ; it would be a dreadful fate, to be sure, if they was to be imprisoned in the house and not get out. But they say there were lots of time for everyone to escape. It's to be hoped they're not attempting to rescue any belongings out of the wreck, which they can't safely do, and had better let alone. Now don't that seem a shame—a fine 'ouse like that. We can't none of us tell when we're safe, can we, and the Lord's ways ain't our ways. Look at the sparks, Georgie. My, don't they fly."

Georgie was pushed aside by a pale, staring-eyed young man, who shouldered his way up the street to gates guarded by a policeman. The policeman said, " No further, please." Benjie stared at him, and said, " I suppose no one's in the house ? "

" It's to be 'oped not," returned the policeman. " If so, they won't come out of it now."

" Where are they ? "

" Who ? . . . Keep back, there ; we don't want none of you beyond this gate."

" Where are Mr. and Miss Crevequer ? "

" Prob'ly somewhere in the garden or yards. I've not been up nearer than this. There are the servants coming this way, if you want to speak to them." Benjie perceived Julia and Mr. Giles, in coat-covered *deshabille* standing on the drive. He called out to them.

" Where are they ? Are you all out of the house ? "

Julia turned a pale face to him, modestly wrapping her waterproof cloak closer about her.

" Yes, sir. *We* are all out of the house. But I haven't seen Mr. and Miss Crevequer anywhere, nor has Mr. Giles. We can't help being afraid that they stayed in, or ran in again, to save some of the animals. You know, sir, they had squirrels and kittens and I don't know what all loose about the house, and they might try to rescue them."

" You don't *know* whether they're out of the house or not ? " said Benjie, and pushed the policeman violently aside, and swarmed over the gate, and ran hobbling up the garden and into the circle of the hot, intolerable glare. Another policeman stood as near the house as a man could stand unscorched.

He said, " Go back. You can't come any nearer ; it's unsafe. And there's no good to be done, for everything in that house is burnt to matchwood by now."

Benjie made no answer. He plunged his head and shoulders into the fountain tank, startling the gold-fish, and rose with his hair dripping into his eyes. He pushed past the policeman and was at the open door. Beyond it was the terrible raging and crack-ling and storming of the flames. Coming into the hall, Benjie seemed to stand on an island in a fiery sea. There were no stairs, only a spiral blaze. From above the smoke poured down, dense, choking, horrible. There was no way up. Ceilings and walls were crack-ling, yielding, falling.

Benjie stood for a moment blind and reeling. There was nothing for him to do here ; there could be no life left above those stairs that were no stairs. Only, " If they have died, I had better die too, for what is left to live for ? " he cried, aloud or within his soul, and one half of him would have kept him waiting there for the ruins to fall flaming about him, and so make an end. But the flesh is strong, and bodily instinct rent his impulse in two and sent him staggering and coughing and blind out at the door, his face buried in his wet sleeve.

The policeman said, " Are you mad ? I never thought to see you come out of that alive. Are you blinded ? Are you burnt ? You see now it's hopeless, don't you ? We can do nothing at all for anything in there, or for any person either (God pity them)—if there is any person. Are you injured ? "

The young man, because he did not know and did not care, answered nothing, but reeled away down the garden. Still blind and weeping with smoke, still smothered and choking, he did not look where he went, but staggered on and on till he caught his foot in the root of a tree, and fell. Where he fell he lay, his head on his wet arms, shivering and sick and blind, in a great darkness that was like death, but shot through and through with pain. He did not know that one hand and arm was scorched and black from finger-tips to elbow ; but he knew that pain throbbed and shuddered in his soul and body, a dreadful living thing.

He knew that the flames had taken and burnt up

what he loved best in all the world, in any worlds that there might be. How he had hated every principle, every lack of principle, that those whom he so loved had stood for, and how much stronger a thing is love than hate! What are principles? Dust scattered by the puffing of a wind to the four quarters of the heavens; straw, burnt by the touch of flame, and their place knows them no more. There shall be no more principles, and no more sea. "Oh, you'll see in the end," came the echo of Bob's voice by the sea that had so brief a course to run—"how everything drops away, and decays and dies, and only people remain, immortal and unquenchable, the source of all the new life that is to be . . . People, people, people—there isn't anything else, in heaven or earth."

No, nothing else. Heaven and earth may roll up like a flaming scroll, and it does not matter. Only if their collapse should catch and crush living people —people one loves—that matters, and that only.

"Oh God, oh God," Benjie muttered, his forehead pressed on damp mould, "did they have pain like this to bear? Oh my God, not like this!"

He, who never prayed, and who believed in no God, prayed the useless backward prayer again and again, as his own pain shook him. "Oh God, oh God, not like this!"

He would never know. And they would never know how he lay thus and shuddered and prayed. Between them and him it was over.

They had thought to the end—or had they been

wiser ?—that he had hated them, because, caring so much, he had feared to care ; because, so dearly cherishing his code of ethics, he had dreaded and shunned its enemies.

Had they been wise and known ? Known of the warfare that had rent him better than he had known it himself ? For they were like wise children, who know and accept, condemning nothing, tolerating all.

And now they had won utterly. Nothing remained against them ; the terrible flames had burnt away everything in heaven and earth. Not a theory, not a belief, not a shred of a principle or desire, but had been burnt in that fire like straw, and scattered like ashes on the four winds. Nothing remained ; not even people, because they too were burnt and scattered ; nothing but black emptiness and in the heart of it a living pain and an anguished cry for pity on those whose need for it was past.

Heavy with that travail, the black, timeless hours climbed on, till they came to the edge where darkness glimmers and fades, and it was as if veil after veil was lightly lifted, till the black was grey and pale. Benjie, the pain and the cry in him stilled by numb exhaustion, looked out from his place of trees and shadows, and saw between dark trunks the colourless sea spreading palely to the unborn dawn.

He knew then that he was in the little wood at the garden's foot. He was glad that he was there, out of sight of the red terror that would now be a hissing, smouldering ruin (unnoticingly, remotely, he had heard the fire-engines at last at their useless work in

the dark small hours). In this shadowed, shut-in hollow he could see only the cold sweetness of the April dawn elucidating the sea's quiet mystery, till its dim twilight blue glinted gold; and out of the opened golden gates there came a wind blowing, and before it fled the homing fishing-boats, whose white sails took the morning. There was something flutteringly, ecstatically happy about the dancing boats; they seemed to lilt to the rapture and the piercing sweetness of the morning songs that filled the quiet dawn spaces with their clamour; one might have fancied the white-winged voyagers singing sea-birds themselves, so indescribably merry were they. They seemed to call heaven and earth to witness that April was yet on the land, and birds and flowers and laughter, and the morning, unslain of death, unburnt of fire—or, if burnt, rising phœnix-like from ashes, with a song.

And thus they, who had loved laughter and April, would have had it, that their perishing should leave these things untouched; that morning should come again with its path of flowers and gaiety, walking goldenly over a glinting blue sea. The morning cried aloud of them. The pale light, creeping now into the hollows of the little wood, illustrated the shadows there, showing this one an empty, still swing, that a slung hammock, this other a crazy sea-saw, one end resting on a glimmering clump of primroses. The yellow of primroses gleamed out furtively from every little hollow, luminously innocent, wide-eyed to the joy of day.

Benjie heard a little nibbling noise close to him and beheld two errant guinea-pigs eating primroses at his side, undisturbed by the strangeness of the night's events. Touching one with his unhurt hand, he seemed to hear again a stammering offer—"W-would you like a guinea-pig?" and a curt reply, "No, thanks."

That again was as they would have had it, that guinea-pigs and primroses should remain, merry and undisturbed. Passing from the earth's face, they had left it smiling after them, as if they had bequeathed their infectious mirth for a legacy. Benjie was not of those who believe in the individual persistence of human life through its physical dissolution; but surely some sort of persistence was here; surely death, dissolving individual isolation, made one a part of all; surely ashes were blown by the dawn wind, and scattered at large, to be gathered into the very fabric of the universe.

And because they seemed to have left that legacy behind them, Benjie, with the primroses and the guinea-pigs, and the April morning, tried to smile, tried to be one with them to that extent; but he could not, so wrenched with anguish in a forsaken world was he; so he closed his eyes on hard, forcing tears, and lay very still, and the guinea-pigs nibbled at his side, and the morning brightened over land and sea.

* * * * *

As in a dream he heard them speaking not far off.

"L-look; there are Benjie and Louie. Benjie, Benjie, Louie, come along!"

Opening his eyes he saw them, coaxing the guinea-pigs, and supposed that he slept and dreamed, and he would have risen and gone to them, but, as in dreams, his limbs were heavy and would not move, so he lay still and stared.

Then they turned and saw him. They said, "Oh, Benjie, are you here, too? We're collecting the animals."

He said "Hullo," gruffly, and smiled up at them, his old abrupt smile, that came queerly on his white, drawn face. All words drove under in him; he waited dizzily for them to speak. That, of course, they did.

"Oh, Benjie, it's all gone—burnt."

"We've been out on the sea all night; we're only just back, and we missed the fire. Was it exciting?"

"Oh, you smell of smoke. Oh, he's burnt! Oh, Benjie, you didn't go inside, did you?"

"Is it bad? Does it hurt awfully?"

"L-let me look."

Betty had his arm gently between her hands; her eyes were wide and dark in her pale face.

Benjie whitened at the touch. If they touched him, they must really be here, then.

"It's all right, thanks," he said, gruffly. "No, it doesn't hurt much just now. Never mind it . . . All night, you know, I've thought you were in there —in the house."

"Oh! We should be gonners, shouldn't we, if we had. Everything's gone—burnt to bits; must be,

the bobby says . . . No, we got up in the middle of the night and went on the sea, and missed it all. The only real fire we've ever had, and we missed it. Wasn't it bad luck ? "

" All gone," repeated Betty, mournfully. " Every single thing."

They looked out of the shadowy hollow between tree-stems into the strange, clear morning ; looked towards the hot, charred ruin they could not see ; and Benjie looked at them, as they sat beside him, each with a guinea-pig upon their knees.

" Yes, it's all gone, I suppose," he agreed, and smiled faintly again, with very bright blue eyes in a wan face ; " all but you."

Heaven and earth had rolled up like a flaming scroll, but people had endured, as Bob had said, the source of the new life that was to be. So he said " all but you," and smiled, content, and the morning sunlight pierced its way between the trees and laughed upon them as they sat there, waiting for the new life to begin.

CHAPTER XV

THE NEW LIFE

AFTER a time Betty said, "Now you're to come to the doctor and have your arm seen to."

"And what after that?" asked Benjie, content to leave it to them.

"Oh, after that—why, we'll think of that later," and he was reproved, not having yet learnt wholly their episodic way with life.

"Well," he said, "shall we all have breakfast together in my cart? You see, there's nowhere else you can have breakfast, is there? So please let's." They agreed to that; they never refused any hospitality. So they all three came out of the wood and through the garden that was grey with blown ashes and dew.

"It looks funny, doesn't it," said Tommy, of what had been the house. "It's still too hot to go inside, but later we'll explore. I expect it's rather interesting inside."

Benjie knew it would be interesting, later, to explore a burnt house. But now he felt giddy and sick, and his arm hurt, and he thought only of how far it was to the doctor's house.

Two hours later they were all making a good breakfast in the van, as it stood in the Crevequers' garden —bacon, and tea, and bread, and raspberry jam. Benjie had his arm in a sling, and bandaged up with whatever unguent soothes the pain when one is burnt. The Crevequers cut up his bread for him, and spread it with jam. He told them where to find everything, and discovered that they were rather handy—much handier than Cecil. He speculated, as he watched them frying bacon, on their past career.

From that they turned together to speculations on the future, though that was a period with which the Crevequers were not wont to trouble themselves overmuch, being children of to-day.

"You remember, Tommy," said Betty, becoming meditatively wistful over departed glories, "when Father Estcourt said once that we couldn't keep it. I had a feeling then that he was somehow right, that it wasn't meant for us to have always."

"I call it sickening," said Tommy, taking more jam; "our beautiful house. And we not even there to see."

"Well," said Betty, "now it's gone; and we're as we were before. Worse, because we owe a most awful lot of money. You know," she added to Benjie, "we couldn't have gone on living in it, anyhow, because we've spent all our money—more than all, really."

"We meant to let it or sell it, or something, and raise some money that way to go on with. But now we can't. We're absolutely broke."

"It was extraordinary how our money went," Betty mused. "I can't think where it all went to. Of course we *did* spend a lot—but then we had a lot to spend, and it didn't seem to matter."

"You probably think the house was insured," said Tommy, aggrievedly. (Benjie had thought no such thing.) "But it wasn't. Because we didn't think it would be burnt. It didn't look as if it could burn. I suppose some fool dropped a match somewhere. Probably Betty."

"Your motor should fetch something," Benjie suggested; but they looked at him sadly.

"We sold it a week ago. We were getting so hard-up, you see. We've sold the *Marchesina* too, really; that was why we went in her to-night, for the last time."

"We've spent the price we got for her already, paying people who wanted their money at once. I wonder how much we owe, and can never pay now. We haven't the least idea. I do hate not paying people; it's so horribly disappointing for them. But wh-what can we do?"

"That is what I was going to ask you. What *shall* you do? Take to the roads again?"

"Oh, I expect so. Something will turn up; it always does. And I suppose we can sell the garden for something . . . We're used to not having money, you know; we don't really mind much. Only it *has* been fun, being rich. I wonder if we really did all we might have done with it." Their eyes became wistfully retrospective. Then Betty gave Benjie a shamed glance; she had forgotten for the moment

what he thought and had publicly said about their modes of expenditure. She half expected a diatribe now, and when nothing came from him but his smile, she was relieved, but a touch perplexed. What had happened to Benjie in the night, to give him this new, smiling serenity, this wide, moral-less charity ? "

" I was going to say," said Benjie, " if you're vagabonds at large, so am I, you know. Shall we join forces for a bit ? Will you come with me and Richard in the van, till something else turns up ? "

They looked at him, half puzzled, but each with a single deepening dimple (they had only one apiece) betraying pleasure.

" It would be frightfully amusing," they said. " We should love it." Betty added, " But we didn't know you were going on in the van. We thought you were going to live somewhere—in a house, you know —with your father and your wife."

" Oh, no," said Benjie, serenely sure of that. " I'm not. That was a foolish plan, and would have pleased no one."

They hesitated, still puzzled ; they didn't quite understand him.

He explained a little further, groping back after the old burnt ideas that were now so remote from him that it was to himself rather than to them that he tried to explain them.

" I had an idea—I don't know what I thought, exactly, but I was an ass, anyhow—a sort of idea of it being a good plan, and all that, and the way one ought to live. I was a lunatic. I've stopped being

a lunatic now. That's all. I know now that people ought to live in the way they like."

There was a little pause. The Crevequers probably knew nothing about it either way; they never did know that sort of thing, as Benjie did. They only knew from moment to moment what they desired and intended to do.

After a moment Betty asked, "And will *they* like us being in the van too? And will there be room?"

Benjie frowned a little. "They? Oh, they—I see. No, there wouldn't be nearly room. But they won't be here, you see. They wouldn't care about it." Again there was a little silence. The Crevequers were not entirely sure what to make of this.

"In any case," said Benjie, calmly, "and whether you come with me or not, I shall not live with them. You see, they wouldn't care about it; it was my plan, and it was going to be very boring for them. I was going to try and improve their taste, and all that sort of thing. I wasn't going to let them live as they liked, a bit; it was all to be my show. Well, that's all done with. I see I was a conceited ass."

The model family in the model cottage had perished indeed in the ravaging flames, and were scattered in fine ash.

"Couldn't they come," suggested Betty, tentatively, "and just be happy with us, playing about?"

"We're happiest," he told her, "each going our own way . . . Oh, you don't understand about my marriage," he said, being utterly frank now; "it was merely a silly idea of mine for . . . well, I

needn't go into that, it's too absurd; but, as you know, Louie got tired of it and wanted to end it long ago; she always had so much more sense than I had. I've been persuading her lately to have another try, and to help my father and me to make a household together; but I see now that she was right and that it can't be done. I've chucked it all now: it's gone." His hand indicated the scattering of ashes to the winds. "In future we shall be good friends, and go our separate ways. If you won't come with me I shall be alone, and shall have no one to cut up my bread for me while my hand is bad."

"Oh, but we will; we w-will come," they cried, stammering in their eagerness. "We would love to. Wh-what fun!"

Having achieved his point and finished his breakfast, Benjie lay back rather tired. It is exhausting to have your future career, your principles, your theories and your arm, all burnt together in one night—not to mention all that you think is burnt and find is not. So Benjie lay back in silence, but his eyes were bright in his pale face, and the spring wind danced in through the open door and breathed of April journeyings, and pink and white apple-trees fluttered and blew, and in them the carolling birds seemed to take up the Crevequers' motto in chorus—"What fun, what fun, wh-what fun!"

"Well," said Tommy, presently, "I think we must now go and look at the house, and talk to the bobby, and feed the animals, and do all the things one does do when one's house has been burnt down."

" And soothe the servants," said Betty. " They're scattered like a c-crowd of frightened sheep. Well, they'd have had to go directly in any case, because we couldn't afford them, so they haven't lost much, except their clothes and things. Tommy, whatever we can't afford to do, we *must* pay them their wages. I simply daren't face them and tell them we can't."

Tommy gloomily jingled a few coins in his pockets.

" My dear Betty, we can't afford luxuries like that now. We're not made of money any more. The servants will have to take pot luck with the baker and everyone."

" I've got plenty to spare just now," Benjie put in, blushing a little, quite unnecessarily.

They beamed at him. " Really and truly ? Oh, if you *could* lend us just the wages—and perhaps the baker, because he's such a nice, good man—we should be most awfully obliged. Are you *sure* you won't miss it ? "

" No, rather not." Benjie was reassured ; they received as easily and happily as they bestowed.

" Hurrah. Come on, then ; we needn't be afraid even of Julia now. Come and see if the house has cooled yet, and we'll go and climb about it and see if there's anything left. Do you think the baths are melted away ? "

" Oh," Betty gave a little scream. " The crabs, Tommy ! We left your bath full of them, swimming in sea-water. Oh, do you think the water will have saved them, or will the fire have dried it up ? The *poor* darlings ! "

"Well, it can't be helped now," Tommy said philosophically. "You should have thought of them before you dropped that match. However, we will come and discover the worst."

They all three went together to do so. A burnt house is extremely interesting. Never having personally inspected one, I cannot attempt to describe it, or even to pronounce on the fate of the crabs or the baths; it would be foolish to be recklessly inaccurate in these matters, for no doubt there are those who know. But anyhow it was interesting. It took them all day, and when they were hungry they went to the van for meals. They wandered to and fro between the van and the dead house, conveying various charred and smoky objects that the flames had not been able to consume, and that it seemed a pity to leave. The Crevequers, though they held their posesssions lightly and loosely, loved them; they would seem to have the secret of the gayer saints, who love and laugh, and lose and laugh the more. This Benjie thought of them, having helped them through the day to grope among ashes for treasure, and heard them greet each find with joyful surprise. That was typical of them; that was the way they took life, greeting each event with joyful welcome. Wasn't that the way to live—to take what arrives and be thankful, to lose all and yet never lose all, because, having nothing, one yet possesses all things? Life to these was no empty vessel to be filled with wine, but the very wine itself, spilling over with beauty and delight. They did not, like Hugh

and many others, demand that good things should be put into their hands ; they were craftsmen, and made their own good things, by sheer delight in them.

Benjie, kept awake by his arm in the night, becoming morbidly lucid, thought these things out. Within the van, behind two curtained corners, there was light, regular breathing, as of sleeping children. But Benjie, lying, as his custom was, outside, saw the stars and the spring night and the wide world that called, " Come and know me. I am yours if you will have me." So many long years—twenty-four and a half—he had wasted foolishly, trying to improve what he should have tried only to enjoy. For joy is the great thing ; he knew that now. If joy should fill the world, the kingdom of heaven would be come upon it in truth ; so let each do his part in that fulfilling, and make and take joy while he could, and strive no more against life, which was surely good enough.

So beneath the shining of the April stars, and before the sudden chorus of the birds pierced the unborn morning, Benjie fell asleep, wrapped in a serene and smiling peace.

CHAPTER XVI

THE LEGACY

LOUIE came to them about two o'clock, when they were having dinner outside the van. She wore a black sailor hat and an old brown jacket, and carried a paper bag which had held biscuits and now held crumbs only, it being a pity to waste paper bags.

She said, " I come by the eleven fifty from Wattles. I only hear this morning of the accident, and I come straight away. Ben, lad, you ought to be in bed; oughn't he now ? " She appealed to the Crevequers, who said, " Oh, bed," vaguely, as it was not a place they ever thought much about, and it would seem great waste of time to be there while there was a burnt house to explore.

" I'm all right, Louie," said Benjie, and smiled at her. What had this young woman with the paper bag ever had to do with him ? Nothing linked them now but a snapped chain; they were both free.

She shook her head doubtfully over him.

" You must rest, Ben. I'm going to take you right away home with me to lie easy, till we can settle in that little house." (Louie never called it a cottage.) " You look proper ill, my dear."

Now that they were of the same class, she could more easily call him that; the words slipped off her tongue without embarrassment; she was conscious only of her lad's pale face and shadowed eye-sockets. She felt so much older than these three babes picnicking on the grass. What infants for Ben to be left in the care of, with his injured arm, and he only just out of an illness too.

But Benjie said tranquilly, "No, Louie. I'm not going to lie up. I'm quite all right now, and I'm staying in the van. Have some food."

She showed him the bag of crumbs.

"Sweet Maries. I finished them up in the train. I don't want nothing further, thank you. . . . Ben, you really can't stay on in this dreadful old van, and you looking so ill and all. It's fair foolish. You must come home with me till that house is ready for us, you really must. Mustn't he, now?"

She appealed to Betty. Betty, looking from one to the other, said, "Yes. He m-must, of course," simply, as if she had no doubts. Benjie stared at her. She didn't know what she was talking about. He was just going to tell Louie that the little house would never be ready for them, nor they for the little house, but Louie to-day was newly loquacious. She talked on, and her brown eyes shone unusually.

"I want you to come and look at a little house in the new row they're building—Virginia Terrace, they call the row—you remember, Ben? Up beyond the bridge. Such nice new-looking houses, none of them old nasty whitewash and thatch things they

had there before; they're all gone, and these are nice semis—yellow brick, you know, with pretty carved porticoes—ever so nice, they are. I should be rare and happy, Ben, if we could be there; so would your father, I'm sure. That do seem so nice, to be in the new part, with the new houses all round. I shall be proper glad when we can move in, Ben. So you've got to get well quick." Her eyes were on his face, with their queer mingling of joy in him and care for him and hope and pride for herself and the new yellow semi. She thought he looked alarmingly pale—paler than when she had first arrived.

He said nothing. He seemed to stumble after words, but sighed and renounced them, and sat very still, leaning back against a tree-trunk, an unfinished piece of bread and cheese beside him. When she paused, and waited for him to speak, he still could not, and it was Betty who said, "Yes, he must g-get well quick."

And Tommy, getting up, said, "Will you come and look at our burnt house, Louie? It's awfully interesting inside."

She gave him the indulgent, kind humouring she always gave the young, and they went off together.

Benjie sat still, and frowned boyishly over his over-hung blue eyes, that seemed to look along a road and find something barring it where he had thought the way was clear.

Betty cleared away the dinner things.

"Still," said Benjie, looking at her at last, "I don't quite understand. Can you explain it to me?"

Benjie always wanted things explained, and the Crevequers could never explain them; that was awkward. Betty shook her head, giving it up. What did he want explained? It was so easy, so obvious. You may demand of an infant why it cries when it wants nourishment; but you will not induce it to explain, because it does not know any more than that such is the way of life.

But Benjie, who wanted all things on a reasoned basis, said "Why?" and said further, frowningly struggling with thought, "I thought that there were no principles—none at all. No, I didn't; I thought the only one was that happiness counts. Why, then, can't I take the way to it? Oh, but I don't understand. Do you?"

The gate he had run up against had bruised and hurt him; he was like an injured, bewildered child.

"*Isn't* it happiness that counts, after all?" he said, appealing to her who had taught him that it was.

She tried, leaving the plates alone, to enter into it, to rise to his plane, where one argued and reasoned and came to conclusions. The effort funnily knitted her black brows over her pondering eyes; the Crevequers were not used to thought. But Betty desperately wanted to comfort Benjie, to drive that look out of his bewildered eyes.

"That's j-just it," she assented at length, not finding much comfort available. "Happiness does count, so awfully much. . . . Hers, you know. She wants you."

"Oh . . . I see." What he saw was a great question-mark, overspreading the universe. Happiness counts. But whose? That is the immense, the far-reaching root question, the answer to which decides the issues of the world. Whose? Yours or mine?

Benjie saw it as a dilemma which admitted of no compromise whatsoever. He put it to her, baldly, in his bitterness. "Whose happiness, then? One's own, or some other?"

But she could not tell him that; she could not for a moment face that basic question; the Crevequers never resolved the universe into first principles; they accepted it ready-made. Only one thing Betty knew, and that not from principle but from intuitive experience.

"One's g-got to be pleasant, I suppose."

That summed such altruistic philosophy as she had; and that was the barred gate.

Benjie accepted it, seeing clearly at last.

"It seems," he said, "that one has."

After that no more was said between them for a time. Betty washed up, and put the things away in the van. When she had finished that, she came and sat on the ground at Benjie's side.

He looked round at her, and she knew by his face that he was no longer battering and bruising himself against the barred gate; he had turned back from it and was retracing his steps. Where his own road had led him long since, the Crevequers' road was leading him now; since nowhere one could escape

from principles, one must accept and make the best of them.

"Will you have Richard and the van?" he said, in his normal, matter-of-fact manner. "I shall be living in a semi-detached villa at Wattles, you see. I shall have no further use for the van; it would only be a nuisance to me. I shall be glad if you will take it and use it for as long as you feel inclined—till something else turns up, you know."

Betty nodded, with wet eyes, and accepted. "One always accepts" might have been the second Crevequer principle. People, circumstances, poverty, wealth, friendships, religion, vans—nothing was rejected.

"Thank you; we would love to have it. . . . We want to go back to Italy, you know, when we can afford to; but till then we can peddle splendidly in this. Brooms, saucepans, chairs, k-kettles. . . ."

It was wiser, perhaps, not to dwell on kettles. For a moment the vision of that unspeakable medley of purchasable objects shone before Benjie's eyes sun-lit; he smelt the dust on the road at evening and the hawthorn in the hedge at noon and the odour of frying bacon; he heard laughter and the song of birds.

Then between him and the vision rose a semi-detached villa of yellow brick, with a carved portico, ever so nice.

"One's got to be pleasant, I suppose," he muttered, clinging to that raft in a submerging sea, that word which explained this dark and chaotic riddle we call life.

"Oh," stammered Betty suddenly, unsteadily, pleading against his pain-darkened eyes, his set lips, "Oh, let's all have g-good times. . . . We *can* have good times, always. . . ."

Even in yellow brick semis, ever so nice; even with a wife we have married on principle and a father with whom we have little acquaintance and desire less.

Benjie looked at Betty, and his lips relaxed into a faint, queer smile. "I believe you can, always," he slowly answered her.

"*You* can. *You* can. . . ." She caught his unhurt left hand in her thin child's fingers. "Oh, you can, and you must, and you w-will. You'll have a good time, and you'll give *them* a good time."

"That," admitted Benjie, "being manifestly the business of life, I suppose one must try to carry it through as well as may be. And you too will have a good time, I think? So there we all are, as if the millennium had come upon us. One's got, no doubt, to be happy as well as pleasant."

She still held his hand, and her eyes pleaded for happiness, the thing that counted.

"You *will*?" she said, as if she would have his promise. "Oh, it's so easy. It's all so jolly, so—so frightfully nice and funny. You can't *not* have a good time, hardly. But you *will*?"

Since he would have given her anything she had asked of him, he gave her that, and it was much.

"Yes," he said. "I will."

Louie and Tommy came back from the house.

Louie said, "That do seem proper queer. Mother'll be rare and pleased when I tell her. But isn't it a shame, your beautiful house, and the furniture and all? It were fair shocking, weren't it? . . . There were a gentleman at Wattles had a fire; it started with a spark from a train flying on to his thatch—he were keeper of the crossing, Ben, you know—and it were burnt up; but it weren't a big house like yours, though they say it were fair dreadful to see the flames go up. I missed that, through being at my aunt's at Clacton, but mother, she got a good sight, and she say it were a treat to see. Mother's rare and fond of a fire now and then. I don't like them, they're that destructive. But folks that have that nasty thatch to their roofs haven't no one but themselves to thank. Them nice semis, Ben, has slate, of course."

"Of course," said Benjie, cheerfully. "They would have. Now I'm going to collect a few things out of the van to take with us. Not many; I shall leave them mostly for you two, if you don't mind. Oh, Tommy, Betty says you'll do me the kindness of taking over Richard and the old cart; I must get rid of them, you see. I only want the books out of it, and a few more things. When we've packed them we'll go to Wattles by the 4.47 train, Louie. Will that do?"

Her smile answered him.

Before they caught the 4.47 train, they all had tea together. Louie shook her head over the ramshackle arrangements. Poor Ben; no wonder he

looked ill; but never mind, in the new semi he should always have a nice tea at a table.

"You must come and see us," she said to the Crevequers. She was pleased that Ben had made friends at last with these two, who always seemed so nice and pleasant-like, if rather lacking wisdom. Ben had had, in old days, such a queer feeling against them. A moment's pause followed her invitation; Benjie did not endorse it; apparently some remnant of the queer feeling still lingered.

"But you won't be in England long, shall you?" was what he said when he did speak.

Betty said, "No. We shall save up and get back to Italy when we can. It doesn't cost much, really. And it's so much cheaper living there; we should have gone back ages ago if it hadn't been for the house and money." A little sigh was given to departed glories.

Louie said, "Home's the best, though; better nor any foreign countries. You'll never settle down abroad?"

"'Tisn't abroad, you see," Tommy explained. "But I don't suppose we shall settle down anywhere. We can't afford to. Settling down needs money. Perhaps some day someone else will die and leave us a house and fortune; if they do, we'll settle down again, and have nothing but electric light and heat radiators, so that Betty can't drop matches about. Till then we must wander homeless. Oh, we *have* a house, you know, in Italy, a very nice one, but we've no money to live in it, so we let it."

"Dear me, who'd ever have thought that now," Louie murmured, and the Crevequers looked rather hurt.

"Why *shouldn't* people think we have a house? We had two the day before yesterday. And now we have a van, so that really makes two again. It's awfully good of you, Benjie, to give us your van."

"He won't never want it again," Louie said for him, "now as we're going to live in that nice little house. Shall you, Ben?"

"No," said Benjie. "I shan't never want it again."

Peace dwelt in Louie's patient eyes, illumining them. She was coming into her kingdom, and saw it shining there, a settled, unshifting heaven beneath a slate roof. To settle down in the new semi and "do for" her Ben, who after all came only of poor folk, the same as herself—perhaps sometime to have another little John to do for—what had heaven to offer more than that?

She got up, and brushed the crumbs from her lap.

"I reckon we ought to be going for that train, Ben."

They said good-bye there, in the garden, before the burnt house. They pressed on Benjie the spotted guinea-pig, his namesake. He had refused it long ago; but he accepted it now. Perhaps to accept was another of the new things he had learnt.

They said no word of meeting again. Perhaps they all knew that that was done with, that the roads must part here.

They went out of his life, leaving behind them a foolish spotted guinea-pig and the echo of laughter, and one absurd rag of a principle that he had henceforth to live by in a chaotic world, having had all others burnt from him by fire.

What he would make of the ridiculous world he could not tell. Nothing much, probably. What they would make of it he knew—a ramshackle comedy bordering on farce.

They had at least taught him that life is not a solemn thing. Pathetic, yes, tragic often, squalid, splendid, crazy, jolly, lit with dreams and laughter, an immense joke and a black grief—but solemn never. Benjie, the solemn little boy, had grown up at last and put away his childhood's gravity—and Louie should have wax flowers if she liked, yes, and antimacassars too, and his father should do no stroke of work, but smoke and drink and loaf and talk, because happiness counted so awfully much. . . .

That was their legacy, with the foolish guinea-pig. So they went out of one another's lives.

CHAPTER XVII

DAISYVILLE

On a Sunday in June of the following year, Cecil and Jerry Bunter, having done with their triposes and being tired of May week, which had just run its glorious race, bicycled out to Wattles to see the Pritties. The Pritties lived in a region of Wattles that roughly jarred one's æsthetic sense, if one had any—the new growth of white-brick, slate-roofed little villas that stood in a semi-detached row and genteelly called itself Virginia Terrace, having once, before the mushroom growth, been Pond Lane, There was little pleasure to be derived from visits to this vulgar haunt of would-be gentility; no element of the picturesque was to be found there; its commonness, its cheap little pretentious ugliness, made Cecil positively sick, and Jerry could have no concern with it. He didn't get angry with vulgarity like Cecil; he merely felt it a remote, irrelevant thing, and nothing to do with him. Since Benjie lived in the middle of it, Jerry followed him there, being very fond of him, but bestowed no attention on his environment. There is, of course, much

vulgarity, much ugliness, on the face of this varied earth ; really, life is not long enough to bother about it, as Cecil did, as Benjie had once been used to do before what Cecil called his perversion. Nowadays, Benjie didn't seem to bother about anything much ; he took life nearly as easily as Jerry himself.

He was digging in his patch of garden when Cecil and Jerry leant their bicycles outside his gate and came in. He was in his shirt-sleeves, but a black coat hung on the fence by him. They already knew that Benjie wore a black coat on Sundays now ; it was one of those deplorable emblems of smug Philistine respectability that were so at variance with all his past career. When Cecil had used these words to him, he had merely said, " Louie likes me to, it seems. I don't know why, but she has a feeling about it, so I do it. It doesn't matter particularly what colour one's coat is, does it ? "

No, of course not—but it " stood for " so much besides ; a whole army of Philistines in black coats thinking it wrong to do things on Sunday were waiting, ready to absorb him, Cecil conveyed.

" I don't think," said Benjie, " that it ' stands for ' anything. It's merely a colour. Ugly, of course—but if Louie likes it . . ."

" Perhaps," Cecil had accused him, " you *don't* dig and carpenter on Sundays now." For to her mind one thing went along with another, and she was ready to suspect him of any obliquities.

He answered her tranquilly. " Yes, I dig or anything else on any day of the week, if I want to.

Why not ? One's coat doesn't affect one's actions. One thing has nothing whatever to do with another, in that way. Why do you want to make the whole world divide into camps ? "

Cecil had said it was already so divided ; one had only to choose one's camp. For her part she had selected the Bohemian camp. If Benjie was to go over to the Philistines, it would be a betrayal of Truth.

Benjie had said, " There are no camps. And if I like to wear a black coat, *and* a top hat, and garden in them all Sunday morning, which am I in ? "

" You'd be merely incoherent," Cecil had told him, " and you can't be anything much worse."

" I am incoherent," he had returned, placidly. " And when you are my age, you will be incoherent too. The strain after a studied coherence is the bane of the very young. The universe is not coherent, according to my knowledge of it ; it is a series of unrelated episodes. A most surprising place, I admit—but surprise is always interesting. You are a monist ; you want to reduce it all to a single basis. You think there is a Truth. I happen to be a pluralist. There we differ, you see."

More and more since then Cecil had been discovering how deplorably they differed. It was tragical to see Benjie so dropping down the ladder rung by rung. Respectable vulgarity marked this house, within and without. Respectable vulgarity and hopeless incoherence ; for, side by side with the things Louie liked, there were some of the things

Benjie liked ; only a few, because Louie didn't care about them filling up room. He accepted her Coronation portraits as pictures for the walls, side by side with his drawings and prints and Japanese paintings and her beautiful young ladies from Christmas Illustrateds. A catholic, incongruous, incoherent scheme of adornment, not worthy to be called a scheme at all, but merely a jumble exhibition.

On this Sunday afternoon there was a family party at Daisyville (the name had been selected by Louie, painted on the gate by Benjie, and was used only by the household, as everyone else knew it was 13, Virginia Terrace, only as Louie said, you can't live easy in a 13). When Cecil and Jerry arrived, they found Benjie, as has been said, digging in the front, his father sailing boats in the tub at the back, Louie setting tea in the parlour for all of them, Stanley Wilfred (Louie's turn to choose the name this time) doing whatever one does do at the age of six months in his pram by the door, Dot, the cripple (again domiciled with her sister and brother-in-law), sitting by her nephew and conversing with him, and Mr. and Mrs. Robinson watching Louie get the tea. Mrs. Robinson wore black. Harry, poor youth, had died of consumption a year ago—the most fortunate episode in his career. Killed, as Cecil remarked, by the criminal selfishness of the economic system for which we, the upper classes, are responsible. What do we care for the miserable units, the Harry Robinsons of the world ? We go over them with our Juggernaut wheels and leave them crushed and

mangled, and happy for them if death takes them out of their misery. "Very true," said Benjie, agreeing.

So they all had tea when it was ready. Not in the garden, as Benjie had dreamt long since, because Louie thought meals should be in houses, and wasn't going to have them nasty sniggering Wilkinsons next door overlooking their tea-table and hearing their talk. Besides, the insects! In short, gardens are gardens and parlours are parlours, and there is a place for everything and everything in its place, and the place for tea is the parlour. So in the parlour they all sat down to a well-spread board—tea and cake and bread and butter and honey (Mr. Prittie kept bees) and three eggs, one for Benjie's father and one for Louie's and one for Dot (they kept four hens), and ham for the rest.

They talked, of course, of the Coronation, because there was just going to be one. Jerry said, "Oh, is that this month? Well, I shan't mind, because I shall be in Devonshire, and I needn't see papers." Jerry had a serene detachment from the vanities of this world that a Thomas à Kempis might have envied.

Louie said, "They say the motor 'bus will run up to town that day, leaving Wattles at 4 in the morning, and it'll cost 5s. 6d. return. That'll be a rare treat for some."

Cecil said, "Imagine *wanting* to see the horrid thing!"

Mrs. Robinson, who took a catastrophic view of

life, said, " I suppose there'll be a many killed that day."

Mr. Prittie said, " The Naval Review'll be the thing. That'd be the sight to take the little chap to, Louie. Make a sailor of him, it would."

Benjie said, " Do you want to go up in the 'bus, Louie ? " and her eyes shone with pleasure.

" That'd be a rare sight for baby to say he'd seen, wouldn't it ? We don't get a Coronation every year, do we," and Cecil shuddered at that thought.

" They do say," said Mrs. Robinson, " 'as how the King ain't got so long to live, likely. We'll perhaps be 'avin' another within the five years."

Cecil said it was to be hoped that the institution of monarchy had not so long a course as that to run. A democratic republic was on its way, and this sort of vulgar pageantry was doing its best to precipitate its advent.

Dot said, " Why, Louie, you'd never go up to Lundon, Coronation Day ! You'd miss the sports an' the meat tea."

Louie said, " Well, I don't mind particular either way ; it's baby I'm thinking of. It'd be something for him to say, later, as how he'd seen the procession. Baby wouldn't enjoy the tea and the sports, he ain't big enough, the mite."

" It'll be a 'andsome percession," Mr. Robinson murmured. " Something wunnerful to see, they say."

" They say as 'ow the Queen can't 'ardly dror 'er breath, 'er clothes is that 'eavy," said Mrs. Robinson.

" An' laced ! I expect they *is* laced in, them ladies. 'Ave to be, you know, for the look of it. But it won't be a wonder if some o' 'em don't live through the day, in this weather an' all. Reg'lar Coronation weather, they calls it ; but I'm sure if I was the King an' Queen I'd as soon 'ave it a mite cooler. The people in the streets'll be dyin' like flies, I shouldn't wonder, them as ain't crushed by the press."

" You feel the 'eat, mother, bein' so stout," said her husband, jocosely. This was a favourite joke, Mrs. Robinson having, as he often told her, no flesh to her bones.

" I could fancy the 'bus-ride," said Louie, who had been thinking it over. " It'd be a fine treat if we was to go up. You'd come too, wouldn't you, Ben ? I wouldn't go without you came too."

" Rather," said Benjie. " We'll all go."

Cecil ate bread and honey in silent aloofness. This degradation of Benjie was too painful for remonstrance.

" There's a many goin' in the 'bus from Wattles," said Mrs. Robinson. " That'd be a rare treat, to be sure."

" We'll all come," said Benjie again. " You, too, father. You'd enjoy it, you know, much more than the tea here, and we shouldn't have half a time without you." (Mr. Prittie smiled the smile he kept for his son.) " Let me see," went on Benjie, " You, me, Louie, Baby, Mr. Robinson, Mrs. Robinson—and Dot wants to stay here, I gather —that makes five."

Mr. Robinson said, " Have you the money, lad ? " It was understood that Benjie paid all expenses when they went anywhere together ; he always did. Benjie said he had the money.

Mrs. Robinson said, " 'Oo can say as 'ow that 'bus will ever get there ? There's many a haccident 'appens to 'buses, particular when full." As the reflection appeared to give her pleasure, no one disturbed her in it.

Cecil, tired of the 'bus, said, " Of course Uncle Mervyn is staying in town for what he calls our great Imperial Festival. They've got a front stall somewhere or other. They asked if I'd like to go with them."

" You'll get a proper fine view that way," said Mr. Robinson, annoying Cecil, because obviously he couldn't have been listening to her previous references to the ceremony.

" I suppose I should, if I'd accepted," she said, and Mr. Robinson didn't apparently listen to that either, for he repeated, " A proper fine view that'll be."

Jerry said, " Will you come to ' The Play-Boy of the Western World ' to-morrow night, Benjie ? "

Benjie didn't think he could ; he was going out to supper and a whist drive with his father.

" ' Harvest ' is better than the ' Play-Boy,' " said Cecil.

Jerry said he didn't think " Harvest " was good at all, but a sermon wrapped up in melodrama. Would Benjie come to " Riders of the Sea " on Tuesday,

then? But on Tuesday Benjie was going to see a magic lantern, with Louie.

Jerry sighed a little, and gave it up. Benjie was very much held by domestic ties in these days; one could hardly ever get hold of him. When he wasn't working in his carpenter's shop, he was going off to some repulsive entertainment, or merely lounging about and smoking (he had taken to smoking lately) with his father. Jerry liked Benjie's father, an idle but amusing person of pleasant manners, who got rather tipsy sometimes, which was revolting, but at other times could be an entertaining companion. His affection for Benjie, and Benjie's for him, no doubt made their life together agreeable, but was rather a drag upon Benjie. That was a pity, for Benjie, since he had lost his deplorable missionary tendencies and had become content to take the world as he found it, was a more congruous companion for Jerry than he had ever been before, in spite of the extraordinary pictures and other articles of adornment that he allowed to deface his house, and in spite of his thinking it would be a pleasant plan to go up to the Coronation in the motor 'bus. For all these things were to Jerry (a person of essentials) irrelevancies; they did not touch Benjie the man. Long ago Anne Vickery had said, comparing Jerry and Cecil, "He has a truthful imagination, and sees straight. Poets and artists do."

Jerry produced a thin green book out of the pocket of his blazer and gave it to Benjie.

"My book," he said. "It's pretty good in parts.

The rest is poor, because I had to fill in, to make it fat enough. There's one thing of Cecil's in it. You'll know it when you come to it—in fact, I think it's signed."

Mrs. Robinson said, " Fancy you writin' a book, now, Mr. Jerry ! An' you so busy at your schooling, too . . . They say as none of them writers enjoys good 'ealth, pore things."

" Jerry's enjoyed a pretty good tea, anyhow," said Cecil. " My thing's about our time in the van two years ago, Benjie. I've called it ' Marshlands.' " I wrote it one day down on that marshy bit by the sea—a soft sort of whitey-grey day it was, with quiet waves, and gleams of light—do you remember?"

" Not particularly," said Benjie. " I remember several days rather that colour." Then he looked at Louie, and saw that her eyes were passing from Cecil to him, with their old look of wistful doubt. Her parents, too, were looking at Cecil with a shocked and cold regard. If one has been misguided enough to commit indiscretions in the past, one does not refer to them unabashed over the tea-table ; in respectable circles this is a thing not done.

" That young person," said Mr. Robinson afterwards, " 'as a bold tongue, and oughter be ashamed of 'erself."

His wife said, " It's my belief as how she'd like to win Ben back to her even yet. But that's more than she'll do."

The poor are coarse like that, as Cecil knew ; the more one goes among them, the less one feels able

to fathom the depths of their coarseness. There is, Cecil believed, nothing that they are ashamed to say. Benjie was sorry that Cecil had mentioned the van episode in public. It was foolish, this outraging of other people's taste ; it was time she outgrew it. But, because it was also time that the Robinsons outgrew their coarseness, he said, turning the pages of the book, " I shall be interested to see what you made of that," and, having found what he sought, read it through, in his careful, concentrated way. Having finished it, he said, " I think you are wrong in your reference to the tide. I don't think it can have been quite as you say, at that hour—deducing the hour from your description of the state of the light. I must think it out." He thought it out, drumming his fingers thoughtfully on the page. When Benjie thought a thing out, he gave his whole mind and attention to it. So, for the moment, he was manifestly living in the memory of an episode which should never have been. So, before the Robinsons, he asserted his inextinguishable right to do so, to have his own opinion on these matters, and, by implication, to travel in any van to any place with any person in the universe. He no longer wanted to convert others to his way of thinking in this matter ; but that he refused to be perverted by them was obvious. That was one of the incidents which went to make up the funny, jumbled incoherence of Benjie and his present way of life.

Having thought it out, he conclusively proved to Cecil that she was wrong by an hour or so. " In

other respects," he added, turning over the pages again, " your description seems to me to be very accurate. I am not quite sure that I saw all those colours on the sea—but I probably was not inspecting it very carefully at the time."

Louie was beginning to clear away tea. She did not mind Ben's harking back to the adventure he had shared with Miss Cecil, since he was hers now, and she was dear to him, and they shared not an adventure but Stanley Wilfred, and every sweet, tranquil day and quiet night, and they were going up to the Coronation together in a motor 'bus.

" Let's come and look at the guinea-pig," said Benjie. " I think he has eczema or something."

So he and Cecil and Jerry and Mr. Prittie and Dot and Stanley Wilfred went and looked at the guinea-pig, who certainly appeared to have something. Guinea-pigs often have, of course.

When they had made an exhaustive survey of him, Cecil and Jerry said they must go home.

They bicycled back to Cambridge rather silently at first. They were a little sad about Benjie. They always were when they visited him now.

Cecil said suddenly, when they had gone a mile or so, " Oh, poor old Benjie. What can we do for him ? It'll all so unutterably beastly, Jerry, isn't it ? "

There were tears in her eyes. Jerry, who took things more tranquilly, said that it couldn't be helped, and that it wasn't worth while to bother.

But Cecil went on bothering, running over the

tale of Benjie's woes, which they both knew by heart already.

"The awful house; the dreadful pictures; the blue glass vases, Jerry; the—the horse-hair sofa and its doylies; those unthinkable old Robinsons —and, oh, the Coronation 'Bus! And Stanley Wilfred, all hung over with beads out of crackers, and eating bits of cake out of Louie's mouth. How disgusting! And how bad for him! They'll let him grow up a horrid, spoilt, vulgar child, that only does the things he 'as a mind to. . . . And Mr. Prittie."

"Oh, I like Mr. Prittie," said Jerry.

"Well, I daresay. But what does he do to justify his existence? Not a stroke of work from morning to night; he's merely an amiable, tipsy loafer, of the type Benjie used to hate most. And Benjie fools about with him and goes to *whist-drives*, and hasn't time to come with us to the Irish plays. And that awful 'bus! Oh, how unspeakable, Jerry! *What* a life!"

Jerry shook his head, regretful, but placidly philosophic.

"It comes of marrying. It seems a pity to marry. I shall not do it. One seems to get involved by it in so many things."

"Domesticity," Cecil apostrophised, "is the curse of the middle classes. But some marrying is all right. Hugh and Anne will have a ripping time together, I expect. I suppose, really, one should only marry the people one likes a great deal."

"I daresay," agreed Jerry, who knew little about

it. "It certainly seems waste to do it without some such feeling, considering how many tiresome liabilities it appears to involve."

They bicycled for a while in silence along the dusty road, and the nightingales began their singing in the chestnut trees.

"Jerry," said Cecil, abruptly, "d'you suppose Benjie's *happy*?"

Jerry was looking over the buttercup fields, that spread, golden in the sun's long evening light, on either side of the dusty road. Beyond them wound the little quiet rivers, with the willows, soft and grey, to show where they ran. In the long grass cows stood knee-deep and munched. Over them the cuckoos called their strange June note. Every hedge was a spreading glory of pure white.

It was a lovely, concrete world; a world of foregrounds; Jerry knew that; knew how things were more important than the ideas behind them, phenomena than noumena. One handles and touches and tastes each thing as it comes along; for in the end it is the artist's world, not the philosopher's; and one approaches it with the gay absorption of those who play a game.

"I think," replied Jerry, after a moment, "it is possible to be happy on extremely little." He had never tried, but he had intuitions. He added presently, "I believe Benjie really has a pretty good time. . . . I believe he's learnt how, you see. . . . He looked as if he was going to enjoy the Coronation 'Bus. . . . And, of course, there's always this."

Cecil followed his look over the golden fields, and found them inadequate for the soul-needs of a civilised human being. She sighed, and left Benjie to his fate.

"Anyhow," she said, consoling herself, "there are the Irish plays this week. And to-morrow I shall go and hear Alec Potts on G.B.S. in the Guildhall."

There was, of course, always that, too.

"Life is really quite extraordinarily nice," said Jerry.

THE END

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